

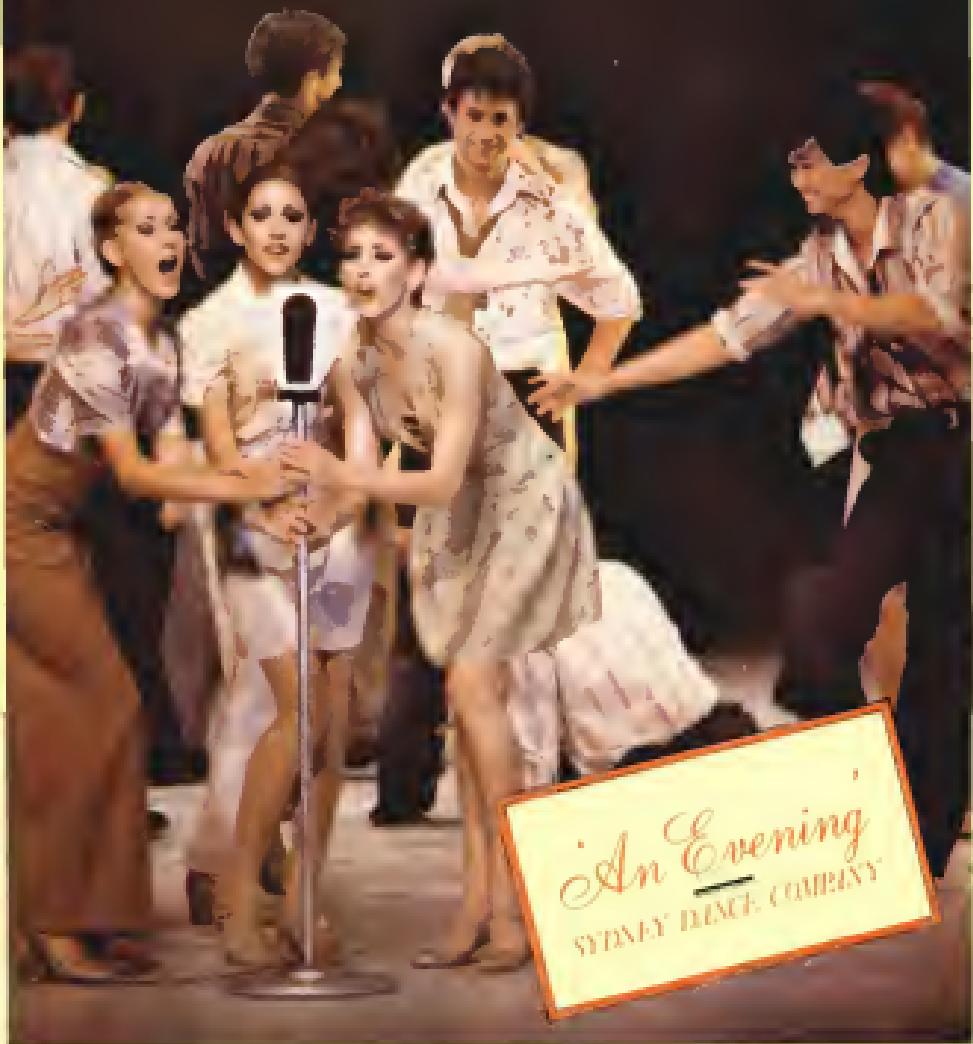
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nal Magazine of the Performing Arts.

July 1981 \$1.95*

Theatre Australia

DESIGN FEATURE/NEW COMPANY FOR CANBERRA/THE
PLAYWRIGHTS' CONFERENCE/IRENE INESCOURT AT MTC.



JUDY DAVIS

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THE SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY
presents

STATE THEATRE COMPANY OF
SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S production of
LULU

Scenes of Sex, Murder and Power
Adapted by LOUIS NOWRA
from Wedekind's "Earth Spirit"
and "Pandora's Box"

Director JIM SHARMAN

Set design BRIAN THOMSON

Costume design by LUCIANA ARRIGHI
Music by SARAH DE JONG

Lighting design by NIGEL LEVINGS
Starring JUDY DAVIS

with Brandon Burke, Sharon
Calcroft, Geoffrey Clendon,
Ralph Cottenell, John Frawley,
Russell Kiefel, Robert Grubb,
Juliet Taylor, Kerry Walker
and John Wood

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

Drama Theatre

July 21 to August 29



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56/MAN FOR ALL SEASONS/*Colin Darkworth*

I AM WHO YOU INFER/*Cathy Peake*

57/ONE-WOMAN SHOWS/*Susanna Spawer*

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BOOKS

60/GENTLEMAN GEORGE AND CANADIAN PLAYS/*John McCullum*



The Sydney Theatre Company
production of

CHICAGO

A MUSICAL VAUDEVILLE



BOOK BY
FREDEBB & BOB FOSSE

MUSIC BY
JOHN KANDER LYRICS BY
FRED EBB

based on the play "Chicago"
by Maurine Dallas Watkins

STARRING
NANCY E. GERALDINE HAYES **TURNER**
TERRY DONOVAN

with
JUDI CONNELLI
GEORGE SPARTELS
J.P. WEBSTER

DIRECTED BY
RICHARD WHERRETT

MUSICAL DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHY
PETER CASEY **ROSS COLEMAN**

SETTINGS BY
BRIAN THOMSON COSTUMES BY
ROGER KIRK

LIGHTING BY
SUE NATTRASS SOUND BY
COLIN FORD

BORAL

The production of
CHICAGO has been
specially sponsored
by Boral Limited

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From September 4

COMMENT

Is the cultural cringe starting to operate in reverse? Guest comment by Richard Wherrett

The Sydney Theatre Company's recent production of *Wunder* happened to be to many people enormously pleasing, perhaps most of all young audiences experiencing the play for the first time. Certainly, it was an anagram of a generation coming that had not had that opportunity that led to its program. Nonetheless, it received some scathing criticism, not only in the press, but also at times in the foyer and the Opera House Green Room, often from the profession itself, frightened, outraged, incredulous!

It received two kinds of criticism that I suffered from a total lack of interpretation, that the play stands naked and unadorned by any kind of concept, secondly, the reverse, that it suffered from not being allowed to stand on its own as a great play, and rather was dressed in the grammar of a director's concept and interpretation.

The truth is my view lies somewhere in the middle. The 19th century setting, being a period marked by its religiosity, militarism and conservatism, seems to me to be hardly a grammar for a play about an individual's benefit of belief, questioning war, and breaking the system. At the same time, the text was often taken very literally, which runs the risk of a lack of interpretation. The ghost is described as walking "more or less than in anger". This is exactly what he did.

I find the result extraordinarily illuminating a kind of interpretation in reverse, leaving both completely what the meaning of the line is. It is the heretic discipline that I have known Mr Cailliet to always bring to a text that led me to the decision to invite him to direct *Wunder*, of all plays that is most ruled by excessive interpretation. It is impossible to please everyone with a production of *Wunder* as it is a Chekhov or a Mozart opera. We all have the definitive production in our head. One person told me as we entered the theatre he had just taken a lot as to where the audience would fall in "to be or not to be".

But that decision, to invite a director from abroad, has been seriously questioned by many, as in that of bringing out

an English designer. Apart from the fact that in the latter case it was a decision reached only after a number of local designers had been approached but found unavailable, it seems to me we are approaching a situation whereby no visitors are wanted here. This I feel is dangerously parochial. I have been par-
mous in questioning the abuse made of visiting artists, and in the case of the STC have argued that once every couple of years it is acceptable in the case of a talent that has something unique to offer, such as *Teachout* from the Berlin Ensemble for the STC's *Moscow Courage*, *Forsyth* from Italy for the Adelaide STC's *Service of Two Minutes* and *ours* with Cailliet. Yet as I say, we were challenged at many levels for our decision, from Equity down to drunken Green Room confrontations.

More to the point, the challenges come more after the fact of the production, and its proving to be less than the outstanding success expected of it. The relative success or failure of the production has nothing to do with the validity of the decision to bring a guest director out to do it. But the reaction to it has been one of shock, horror and rage abroad in a delight that it was not the production expected. See, we don't need them! Why do we bother? Let them piss off and stay where they come from. This is a terrible narrowness, a silly shortsightedness, and a disturbing self-distrust. It's also the cultural cringe at its severest, while just as extreme.

Meanwhile, back in the cast, something of the old sort was still happening. I saw fears and inhibitions of a sort and intensity I've rarely seen with any local director. A strange, chicken-and-egg situation developed, Bill being the sort of director who demanded the actor contribute first, while the actors, waryingly, waited to be told. The result was an impasse, prodding for some time of "nothing, neither way" was happening. True, the director's master — demanding, challenging, aggressive — added to the problem, but certainly the fear centred on some of the action in the first place.

Let's go back a little further, to the audience. It was a very uncertain, self-asserting, and warlike group of actors coming forth. Or else some strange old-leftist concept of "take me as I really am" informed the approach, as people deliberately made less than an effort. Even just in terms of dress and presentation it was as if something of the same kind of obverse defiance gripped people why make an effort for him? he's as better than us! And at the same time, in conversation

(continued on page 60)

Theatre Australia

Volume 13 No. 11 July 1991

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I N F O

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AT AETT

Speculations about possible appointment to the new position of Artistic Director of the Elizabeth Theatre Trust's Entrepreneurial Division were confirmed or otherwise when it was announced that Anthony Steel had the job. He has accepted it on a freelance basis, and will continue with his own entrepreneurial activities and as consultant to such other ventures as the Clutha Cultural Exchange Programme.

The position of Artistic Director has yet to be clearly defined between Mr Steel and the Board of the Trust. In the past the AETT's entrepreneurial activities have been conducted on an ad hoc, show by show basis with a mixture of some highly commercial and some more artistic ventures coming under their banner, including concerts, plays and musicals.

Anthony Steel feels they must in future be committed to acting as a resource centre for projects for the numerous newly created arts centres, capital and regional, and that they must collaborate and complement, rather than compete with the commercial entrepreneurs. He hopes there will be a strong commitment to local product, both in and out of the country, but will doubtless have to move warily at

MOMIMA'S IN EUROPE

In December 1980, from the mothballed environs of the defunct Tasmania Puppet Theatre emerged Nigel Triffitt's Momima's Little Womble Show, a farce reworking of Melbourne's Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant. From the company of the black velvet performing marks of the long and highly successful production of *Momima*, the cast of unseen artists have emerged to form the new company, The Australian Puppet Theatre.

The Company, operating as a co-operative, has convened the mid-faceted talents of Winston Applebyard, Nigel Cox



Members of the Australian Puppet Theatre
Photo: C. A. Young

Ian Curning, Pam de Fox, Frank Iribar, David Ogden, John Roger, Robin Thompson and Fred Wallace, and now having handled the necessary legal documentation, has celebrated its incorporation into the world of commerce.

Riding on the wake of its Melbourne success the APY and Momima's gave a brief sojourn in Adelaide at the Scott Theatre in June, from whence Australian Puppet Theatre departed the shores of Oz taking with them over three tonnes of aluminium scaffolding, multi-tiered props, puppets and enthusiasm for an extensive tour of Europe.

The tour, covering cities and provinces of Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Germany and France, was made possible by the financial assistance of the Australia Council, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Victorian Ministry of the Arts and through the untiring efforts of John Pinder and Roger Evans, and of course months of hard slog by the Company.

Already bookings are sounding for the next production based on the company's concept of puppetry and what better place than Europe, where puppetry is by no means considered to be "kids' stuff", for the collection of stars and stars!

Fred Wallace



Anthony Steel

this one, given the substantial losses made by the Trust on the recent tour of *Collided Arrows*.

Although he will be working with a Board who have previously made the arts decisions themselves, Mr Steel anticipates no clashes. "Of course," he says, "boards have a final say, but their most important function is to hire and fire. When they appoint a professional to do a certain job, they do so believing that person is the best equipped to carry it out."

NIDA HARD-SELL DINNER

On May 31 at the Grand Ballroom of the Wentworth Hotel, NIDA launched its new one million dollar Fundraising Appeal. Supposedly intended to be "The private sector", the function was less corporate for its audience than for actors out to enjoy themselves. And why not? An 80 year old NIDA graduate grappled and agonised on the sudden change of venue from Seymour Centre to the Wentworth, a band of demonstrators downstair waved flags at the guest-of-honour Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. Fraser had a thing that could have got much nastier if the function had gone ahead at the Seymour.

Meanwhile, back at the Grand Ballroom Joe Hartman as compere kept hammering home the theme of the evening - "Hard Sell". This theme was further amplified in the song (eg "Lick be a Lady Tonight") sing by NIDA acting students and in the short documentary recently made by the ABC on NIDA's "appalling" conditions. One also suspected some conspiracy in the number of little black dresses being worn by female NIDA graduates. Perhaps black is the colour of "Hard Sell".

Prime Minister Fraser hardly cracked a smile throughout the "Hard Sell" songs, but managed his own kind of humour when he depicted himself as a "rank amateur" amongst all these professionals. Amateur or not, he skillfully avoided any questions as to exactly when the electorate promised 3 million dollars would materialise, but he knew that building for the new NIDA near the Seymour Centre might begin this year. NIDA received the



Jim Morrison, John Pinder and John Evans at the NIDA Foundation dinner

heat by presenting him with a polygrapho Foundation Sheet dated for December 1988.

NIDA Administrator Elizabeth Rutherford must have felt pleased with the effectiveness of all the hard work involved in setting up the hard sell. Before we left at least one donor had volunteered \$3,000. Even though the quantum of the new centre was still a little up in the air, everyone was home feeling rather buoyant. And there were those who felt not a little guilty for having applauded the former box of Australian artists who had now, a week later turned friend and benefactor.

Helen Mass

MTC HOOTHOUSE

Harold Pinter's *The Hothouse* was actually written in 1958, though it only had its London premier last year and its Australian premier last month at the Melbourne Theatre Company. Pinter put the play aside after writing it and went on to *The Caretaker* and only eleven years later revised it and decided it was worthy of production.

He himself directed it in London, while in Melbourne Judith Alexander has directed *The Hothouse*. Interest in the production was enormous, with the season being virtually sold out and extending extra performances even before it had opened. The cast is headed by Ray Lawler, making his second return to the



Judith Alexander, Director of MTC's *The Hothouse*

stage after a gap of twenty years, following her role in Ron Natale's *In Days Beyond*.

The play derives its name from the atmosphere of the Government mental institution in which it takes place. "My approach to the play," says director Alexander, "has been first and foremost to give all preference to the text, to observe the rhythms and pauses in the writing which Pinter himself regards as important, and to allow for the slow building of tension and sudden changes of mood and tempo. The play has a wonderful peeling-away quality of layer upon layer texture upon texture of carefully interwoven plot and image and character."

THE NEW EVITA

Patti LuPone's New York *Evita* currently starring in the Australian production seems to be raising interest in the musical and higher. General word from the critics who have been back to see it is the new performer is that the show has improved from the days of Jennifer Murphy. Murphy left to pursue a budding recording career, and the second *Evita*, Maribeth Rupper is having a baby.



Patti LuPone — current *Evita*

Ma LaPone did, however, take over performances off during June, the show back to the States to be a guest at the Tony Awards of which she was a winner last year for her performance as *Evita* in New York. She also won the Drama Desk Award for her outstanding performance during the tour season in Los Angeles.

Patti LuPone will be with the Australian production for a total of three months. Meanwhile the search for the "remaining *Evita*" needed for the rest of the Sydney run, continues throughout the country.

AUSTRALIAN WRITERS' GUILD ON THE PLAYWRIGHTS' ISSUE

We at the Writers' Guild would like to congratulate Theatre Australia on a most useful and thoughtful preceding Playwrights' Issue. Directors and management would do well to consider very carefully what our writers have to say.

Was it absolutely necessary, though, to group the playwrights into brackets marked "Top Five", "Next Ten" and "The Rest"? What earthly purpose could this serve, other than to somehow differentiate those writers who might have just as easily made it to the Top Five, or Next Ten — but didn't? Such categorisation, based anyway on people's opinion, can only be harmful. And why do we have to be so competitive, so usage conscious?

As to your list of also-rans, I feel obliged to point out what appeared to me to be some quite serious omissions. Some playwrights who didn't make it to that list could include Barry Roland, John Powers, Gordon Graham, John Suttor, John Upson, Nick Wright, Ron Feltz, Colin Flora, Maegan Hilton, Jane Balada, Fred Willett, Jason Flanagan, Cliff Green and Graham Bond — to name but a few.

With those comments aside, we look forward very much to your next Playwrights' Issue, and to the continued coverage of writers and their views in your magazine.

Angela Wales
General Secretary

John McCullum, Playwrights' section editor, replies.

Along with *Playwrights* there is a rewarding supplement about ranking plays, angles, and an awards awards for effort and achievement. For someone like her in the know, there must be loads to learn from the Guide. It was certainly instructive, in 1987 — a guide for general managers, writers and curators to know which plays then might be. In the three pages we had, a simple assessment for award the best way to fit the more serious in.

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PERTH ACTORS' COMPANY

With a number of new theatre companies opening up in WA, Perth's youngest, the Perth Actors' Company, has



Alan Campbell, founder, Perth Actors' Company

taken a new direction to established. They are prepared to take risks, and, using agents not often seen before on Perth stages, they approach with enthusiasm plays which larger commercial theatres would not be able to produce.

Their artistic director, NIDA graduate, Ken Campbell-Dobson, has ambitious plans for future productions, (but these are of course, subject to the availability of funds). Originally funded through the Department of Health and Education who made available the company's home, St George, Perth's last theatre, their last production *Arnold's Ring Around The Moon* was privately sponsored by Mr David Kahn. Hopefully such generosity will continue, for the new company will need time to win their audience.

FAST IN '81

FAST — or the Festival of Australian Student Theatre — has languished somewhat over the last few years, but this year's organisers have been working to put the punch back into the Festival that died in its early days.

FAST 1981 is being held at La Trobe University (August 23-30), it consists of workshops during the days to be taken by such people as Bob Thameycroft and the Murray River Performing Group and in such areas as clowning, movement, creative dance, playback techniques, mime, kids theatre, circus skills and more. The Festival has a theme of "New (or nearly new) Plays" in the hope of encouraging students to write.

The Literature Board has made it possible for Barry Dickens to write for FAST, although of his commission

play will be in the final three during Festival week and open to others. The first performance will be on the last Friday night, followed by a two week season at Astor Theatre.

FAST also includes an Open Day and a new addition will be Writers' Week the week before the Festival proper. Playreadings and discussions of the participant's plays will take place as well as workshops taken by playwrights like Dorothy Howell, Roger Polson and Ted Norton.

ANOTHER QUEENSLAND PLAY COMPETITION

Following the QTFC's playwriting competition last year, and TV's playwrights' scheme currently running, the Queensland Film and Drama Centre at Griffith University is running yet another, with local history as its theme.

The competition is for a new play on any aspect of Queensland local history and the organisers hope writers will approach this in an innovative way and consider previously neglected aspects. Plays can be written in any style or format. The Centre is particularly interested in plays that are suitable for touring to community venues and that are adaptable for television production.

There is a prize of \$1,000 awaiting the writer of the winner play and a honourarium that the writer hope the piece will be performed at La Boite and published as Playlab Press in 1982 as part of Queensland's cultural contribution to the Commonwealth Games. Entries due on October 16.

SNIPPETS....

CAPPA — The Confederation of Australian Professional Performing Arts

has named Tess Staley as its Chairman. Helen Muus (formerly under Pootier) is the recipient of a general writer's grant from the Literature Board to write the history of the Old Town book, form apparently offers of commissions and correspondence have already been forthcoming. The MacPhail Center for the Arts at the University of Minnesota are considering holding a Festival of Australian arts in 1982. A possible run in this world be a production of an Australian play by a local theatre company. Jack Reiter, director of the Mind Blown theater will consider a piece that is "the less conventional the better...not necessarily avant garde or bizarre but not a standard format...should be strongly physical, not too long, not too wordy." Reiter spent some time at last year's Playwrights' Conference, though, and had problems understanding much material that was "too local." The Literature Board has been asked to submit possible scripts. Trad Theatre Company claim to be the only successful

AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

Theatre Board Grants, 1982

DANCE, DRAMA, MIME, PUPPETRY, YOUTH THEATRE

The Theatre Board has limited funds available for grants to assist the creation of new productions in the following areas:

Community/Student Theatre

A maximum of \$10,000 per application for development of a community or student theatre. Program submitted must be for a new production or a production that has been revised. Any application for a grant for a production involving more than one year of work in development, for which funds have already been spent, will be fully deducted from other grants.

Production — Maximum of \$10,000 per application for the preparation, production or presentation of an experimental or community or student theatre.

Residencies

Maximum of \$10,000 per application for the preparation, production and presentation of a production involving more than one year of work in development.

Commission

Up to \$10,000 — Commission advised by:

10 December 1981 — Residencies advised by:

10 February 1982 — Commissions advised by:

Grant for the creation of a new work

Maximum of \$10,000 per application for the preparation, production and presentation of a new work in development. This grant is intended to assist the creation of a new work involving a production of up to one year's duration and production costs will be limited to one year.

Commission fees

Up to \$10,000 — Commissions advised by:

10 December 1981 — Residencies advised by:

10 February 1982 — Commissions advised by:

Commission fees

Maximum of \$10,000 per application for the preparation, production and presentation of a new work in development. This grant is intended to assist the creation of a new work involving a production of up to one year's duration and production costs will be limited to one year.

Commission fees

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10 February 1982 — Commissions advised by:

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Maximum of \$10,000 per application for the preparation, production and presentation of a new work in development. This grant is intended to assist the creation of a new work involving a production of up to one year's duration and production costs will be limited to one year.

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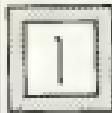
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Commission fees

Maximum of \$10,000 per application for the preparation, production and presentation of a new work

N I M R O D

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Cloud Nine

by Caryl Churchill,
directed by Anthony Mellor

An hilarious study of sexual role confusion tinged with bizarre role reversals as men play women, women play children, and where we can in black roles on a tony society dinner that stretches between acts from Victorian times to the present day, from the jungles of Africa to a city park. Starring Cathy Downes, Michelle Federer, Colin Friels, Barry Otto, Diederik Rubensson, Anna Vekhla, John Walton.



Ron Blair's LAST DAY IN WOOLLOOMOOLOO

Directed by John Bell

The 'Lo is being demolished, its oldest inhabitants booted out of their natural habitat - but in Doreen McHab's boarding house the down-and-outers determine on a violent last stand. Starring Pat Brown, Robert Alexander, Stuart Campbell, Peter Collingwood, Lee Dayman, Ron Falk



Tales From The VIENNA WOODS

by Odon von Horvath,
directed by Anthony Mellor

TALES FROM THE VIENNA WOODS examines the past-hogeneous stratum of Austrian society locked in a struggle for survival and a desperate search for happiness during the interwar years. One of the great European classics, it is a spectacle of fear, larceny, impetuous one-night spending and a dread of tomorrow.



WELCOME THE BRIGHT WORLD

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One day we will wake to find we no longer recognise the world in which we live. Something has gone wrong. How has the police force become politicised? Why am I reading these lies in the newspaper? How could it be that the government is covering up the poisoning of my children? Why do the Secret Police have a file on me?

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SPOTLIGHT

IRENE INESCOURT

— looking for a
change from dotty
old ladies

by Pamela Ruskin

Years ago, somebody told me that Irene Inescourt, today one of the stalwarts of the Melbourne Theatre Company, was a niece or cousin of the eminent English stage and screen actress, Freda Inescort. Both English! Both actresses! So it seemed likely. The first thing then that I asked Irene Inescourt when I went to talk to her was, "What relation were you to Freda Inescort?" She gave me one of those "thereby hangs a tale" looks and shook her head. "None whatsoever" and this was said with great emphasis.

"I don't like the name. I never did and it's not my real name. I was appearing in my first professional engagement, a production of *Smash* through. The man who owned the theatre and caged the company, didn't like my name. It was Irene Casey. Perhaps he didn't like the Irish. Anyhow he said I must change it. My first real theatrical change I have changed it to Mud if he'd asked me. So he went through a theatre reference book and saw that the role I was playing had been played years before by Elaine Inescourt, who was the sister of Freda. He thought Irene Inescourt had a ring to it and that was that. A few days later my phone rang, someone asking for Irene Inescourt. A woman with a very deep voice informed me that her name was Elaine Inescourt and she wanted to know if I were claiming a relationship with her family. I said I wasn't and that I wasn't my name at all and told her the story. She gave me hell, so I offered to change the spelling. She was so rude



that when I were back and told them at the theatre they said, 'Take no notice', I didn't but I still don't like it."

In fact, Irene Inescourt has no family theatrical background at all. "From the age of ten or eleven, I wanted to become a nun. I was a boarder in a strict Catholic school run by a French order, in Kent. The idea was that after I left school, I would enter the novitiate, probably to become a teaching nun. When I was sixteen, I decided I didn't have a vocation. The idea of absolute, unquestioning obedience wasn't in my nature. I question everything."

"I did some commercial art, worked as a tracer for a firm of propellor-makers during the war but my maths were so bad, I didn't last long. Then the family moved to the North-East of England and my father insisted I got a 'proper job'. I went into the civil service, in the insurance section — for five years. It was ghastly. I joined the

choral and amateur dramatic societies and our society hired the local repertory theatre and we did two plays. The producer thought I was wasted in the civil service and so did I. He persuaded the local rep to engage me which they did as Assistant Stage Manager, but I was soon playing parts."

Irene Inescourt, whose family was Irish, has the Irish gift for the telling of tales. She is an excellent raconteur. She also has a love of accents and an ear for them which is probably why she is given so many character parts. One of the things that really make her winsome is her "Stage Irish". Her own is unpeccable which was one of the reasons that she was so outstanding as Widow Quin in the MTC's production of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. The other is that she is, in any case, a very fine actress who can play comedy or tragedy with equal facility. She is continually cast, these days, as

SPOTLIGHT

other dozy old ladies and idiots she'd like a change. 'I'd like to play a really bushy one.'

London and marriage to an actor husband came next in her career and the two worked well together all over England, but after five years the marriage broke down. 'I made my West End debut in 1960 in a play called *Shadow of Heaven* directed by Peter Hall. I did a lot of pantomime which I adore. I love working for children, they are so honest. I worked with the National Theatre for some time and then in 1968 I came to Australia.

'Why? Well, I had a lot of romantic ideas about Australia and I had a lot of Australian friends. Then I was cricket mad. I still am. Also I really worshipped Peter Finch. Now I never met him but I admired him immensely. I arranged to meet Ronald Falk, a Sydney actor who was coming home to see his parents. Someone arranged to meet in Perth and I received an invitation to play with the National Theatre of Western Australia. I worked there for about a year and then I went to Sydney. So during 1969/70 I worked in radio and TV but I never set foot on a stage there.'

The following year, Irene returned to England to rejoin family. It used up most of her savings. She stayed there two years. She was working in Salisbury when she received a phone call from an agent in Sydney — an offer from the MTC for the February 1972 season. She returned and stayed with the MTC for three years. Then she went to Sydney and did a lot of TV and got a Samson for her role as the mother in *Pokey Whaler Girl*, a typical Ireneoult role, indomitable and forceful.

John Sumner invited her back to do a country tour as Emma in *Lavender's Blue Stakes*. After the country tour she played Emma in the trilogy on stage and on TV. 'I just adored those two Saturdays when we played all three plays, morning, afternoon and night! Exhausting, yes, but so satisfying.'

Over the years she has played many roles for the MTC. One that could have been tailor-made for her was that of the doity Abby Brewster in *Asrazy and Old Lare*. Other memorable performances were Madame Devermotes in *Ring Around the Moon*, Clytemnestra in *Orestes*, Lady Bonifacius in *The Bear-Slayers* and much

more, recently the mother of Pete McGinty in *Pete McGinn and the Dreamtime*, a performance that matched that of Keith Michell.

On July 4 Irene's *The Good Person of Szechuan* opens for a six week season at the Art Decoium Theatre. Irene Ireneoult plays Mrs Shan who owns the shop now bought by the young girl Shan Te, a prostitute in a very poor village to which come three men looking for one good person. If they can find such a person, the world can still be allowed to go on. The more good she tries to do, the more trouble she attracts.

When she's not working, Irene Ireneoult indulges her other three loves, cricket, music — especially opera — and reading detective stories, particularly those with an English background. Occasionally, she likes to sketch.

Unfulfilled ambitions? 'I'd like to play the Gratwick Page part in Tennessee Williams' *Seven Days of Youth* and I'd like to go back to England in an MTC tour.' Right now with cut backs in funding at every level the latter ambition, at any rate, doesn't look like being fulfilled.

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GEORGE WHALEY

Seeking his Fortune in Canberra

Interviewed by Barry O'Connor

In your sixth year at NIDA you're leaving this July to become Artistic Director of the *Former Theatre Company* which is based in Canberra. How did this come about?

A bout seven years ago, soon after I came to Sydney, the Canberra Theatre Trust commissioned me to do a couple of reports — a feasibility study for a professional company in Canberra. I have been talking about it and they have been talking about it for a long time. Fortune advertised this position, having got themselves going, and having been in receipt of a bit of federal money from the Australia Council and the Department of the Capital Territory. I applied, was given it, so now I go down very much as a one-man band.

Former was founded as a company about three years ago by a group of actors, and they've had a very spotty-ode-brown so far.

That's right, but what is very good about Canberra those actors are still there. They're very good actors, they're trained actors. There is a number of other actors who've worked in the Jigsaw THE company down there, who've had experience in other places ... There are very talented technical people in Canberra. People who are experienced in theatrical administration as well. Canberra's very strong musically. So Canberra's full of a lot of very good people. What I want to do is have the company very much as Canberra people.

How do you come to a Canberra audience?

I believe there are several definable streams of activity we've got to attempt in Canberra. Obviously there's an audience for the established repertoire. We will do those, I hope we'll do them well. I also think there's an audience for more adventurous new work. We will do those. What I don't want to do is fall into the trap of schizophasic programming. You know that problem when you have a season, you do six plays, so you give them one of these and



one of those which is very different from the first one, then you slip in another one that is a bit different again and nobody quite knows what they're getting.

I want to spread that by using two venues. So I should imagine the Canberra Theatre Centre, the Playhouse, which is a good little proscenium arch theatre, will be the place where one does the established repertoire; and the ANU Arts Centre — in that amazing black box, which I think could be used very well with a bit more work's done on it — is where we may programme the more, you know, the new work. There's another whole area that interests me tremendously, and that is the popular theatre. You know, the theatre restaurante, cabaret. A couple of weeks ago there was a "George III Night" done there with food and music. So I hope we've got a number of different streams of activity, but I don't suggest for a moment that I know what Canberra's expectations are yet. I'll find out.

What kind of people do you want in *Former*?

I don't want a rigid hierarchical structure. What I do want is a group of people who, well, to be pragmatic, must have a variety of talents. I want people who can both production-manage and stage-manage. I want a designer who's also a very good graphic artist, and set painter. I want actors, some of whom will want to direct and some of whom may be very good at teaching, or

running workshops.

Will you be advertising these people or are you still looking?

No, I'll be looking for them. I've started to look. I go down weekends. I just do one interview after the other.

Are there for the opening season?

I honestly don't know yet. But I'll just be two plays. Probably one at ANU and one in the Playhouse. I think there's a possibility of a new Australian work, which is fairly interesting and not yet in third draft form, but getting that way. The major consideration is that we've got to be modest in scope.

You, what about money?

I know that the Department of the Capital Territory and the Australian Council, both of whom have already funded Fortune to a small extent are committed, and have been for some time, to a full-time professional operation there ... of the sort the Fortune will be. Now I'm not unrealistic enough to think that we're going to get mammoth amounts of money next year. Of course we're not. But I think we'll be getting enough to operate a continuous programme for a good part of the year. So, although I don't know how much money, it will be adequate for next year.

Your career so far has included actor, director, teacher; will being an artistic director distract you from your other activities from now on?

No, I don't think so. There is a very good person in Canberra who, I hope, will be the administrator of the company; he's also quite an accomplished director. There is that sort of ability down there. Now, with the sort of company I'm envisaging it is not going to be a mammoth organisational structure, that is going to take a vast amount of running. Of course there are administrative duties, as indeed I have at NIDA. With administration I believe in doing it as fast as possible, so that you can get down to the good stuff.

A last word on our public accountancy director?

I do like doing plays people come to. I do, I really do.



Artistic Director Karen Palmer
Associate Artistic Director Nick Enright
General Manager Paul Iles
Director, Theatre-in-Education Malcolm Moore



At Theatre 52 Adelaide to 4 July,
at Playbox Theatre Melbourne from 15 July

FAREWELL BRISBANE LADIES

Donna Clark
Direction Karen Palmer
Design Sue Russell
Lighting Design Nigel Levings
Cast Maggie Kirkpatrick, Monica Macpherson
(Presented in Melbourne by Playbox Theatre Company Limited)



At Theatre 52, 15 July-1 August and on tour to Mt Gambier, Millicent,
Berri, Renmark, Broken Hill, Pt Pivit, Pt Augusta and Whyalla during
August.

AS YOU LIKE IT

William Shakespeare
Direction Nick Enright, Michael Fuller
Design Richard Roberts
Lighting Design Nigel Levings
Cast Sh-J Coen, Tom Considine, Peter Crossley, Vanessa Downing, Michael
Fuller, James Laurn, Deborah Little, Susan Lyons, Wendy Madigan, Philip
Quast, Henry Salter, John Saunders
(Presented on tour in association with the Arts Council of South Australia)



At the Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House, 21 July-29 August

LULU

Play Frank Wedekind
Adaptation Louise Nevels
Music Berthold Lange
Direction Jan Sherman
Set Design Brian Thompson
Costume Design Lucinda Argoff
Lighting Design Nigel Levings
Cast Brandon Burke, Sharon Celsock, Geoffrey Gledhill, Ralph Cullen, Margaret Davis, John Frisella, Robert Grubb, Russell Kelesi, Malcolm
Robertson, Juliet Taylor, Kerry Walker, John Wood and David de Lutu
(Presented in Sydney by Sydney Theatre Company Limited)



At His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, 31 August-4 September
MACPEL presents

ONE UP MY SLEEVE HEY MUM, I OWN A FACTORY! ACCIDENTALLY YOURS I CAN DO TOO

Director Malcolm Moore
Assistant Director Karen Herren
Writer/Researcher John Lomax
Actions Caroline Baker, Miriam Cochrane, Jenny Lind, Kelvin Hartman, Geoff
Revall, Igor Sas, Paul Spennell
(A production in Perth for the National Association of Drama-in-Education
Conferences. Sponsored by Australian National Railways)

JOHN MILSON

A new direction

by Diane Sedka

Asked what adjective he would use to describe the kind of theatre the director elect of Marian Street, John Milson, opted for "eclectic".

It is fairly apposite and not as facile as it may immediately sound. In some ways he has been a theatrical gypsy for much of his professional life.

Sydney born, Milson was working with the Commonwealth Film Unit when in 1968 Nugget Coombs founded the Australian Council and with it opened doors for people like him who till then had earned a living by day and "dabbled" at night in the things that really interested them.

"In those days there was virtually only commercial theatre—rather terrifying and not all that attractive, so it was a bit of a miracle for those of us who found we could earn a living by doing what we actually enjoyed."

For Milson that meant free-lancing, mainly in open and move-theatre, for regional companies all over the country. He says he still enjoys this kind of work although energetically, relishing the challenges it imposes. In May this year he flew in to Perth to direct *On Our Own* at the Playhouse immediately after doing *La Fossette* in Melbourne. To go from Isidore au cardinal to Dad and Dave in a matter of days may be something of a culture shock but it's the sort of thing Milson says keeps you on your toes.

He was lured for the first time by the Hole-in-the-Wall theatre in Perth when he was made Director in Residence in 1974 and stayed for four years.

In that time his programming embraced such variables as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Death in the Stars*, *White Spring*, *The Trial*, *Edward II*, *Chichester*, and a re-birth of Australiana from *Hibberd* to *Newer*. One thing that a lot of the plays had in common was an distinctive use of language, and if there is a unifying Milson stamp it is probably that musician's ear for the rhythms



and orchestrations of voice and dialogue which frequently made his production an aural delight.

In 1979 Milson took over The Twelfth Night theatre in Brisbane and although for the last 12 months he has been free-lancing again he is well aware of the standard dilemma of a director running a small subsidised theatre.

Looking back he admits that the pieces he really enjoyed doing at the Hole were things like *Happy Days* (Brecht), *The Ardent* and *The Emperor of Austria* (Ariabata), and *Mosse* (Stonely)—"marvellous to do for a tiny minority audience and it would be really easy to stay in that backwater of being arty, but one has a dual obligation to the audience as well as to the funding body."

"If you're running a regional company (and Marian Street is far enough out of the city to be serving its own particular area and therefore considered regional) one is really in the first place responsible to the people who support it. At the same time we have to bear in mind that as a subsidised theatre it's important that we bring our programming into line

for Marian Street

with the kind of fare that funding bodies recognise as important."

That, for a theatre which has generally been described as bohemian, must anger a change of flavour. He agrees. Perhaps in a spirit of noblest oblige or from sheer pragmatism he is quite prepared to justify the presentation of such box-office bread and butter as *A Death of a Salesman* if it is used to pay for "the canva".

"But if funding is given to ensure quality, I think that quality begins in the writing and there is no reason why a play can't be both good quality and entertaining."

Milson does not set himself as a kind of prophet with some arrogant pre-conception of what Marian Street audiences need. He points out that he has not lived in Sydney for seven years and for the first six months of his tenure intends to listen, to feel the audience pulse, and to take it from there.

This year he will offer three widely divergent pieces to the little North Shore theatre and gauge the response. For openers there is the little-known, but fascinating and virtuous two-hander *Cruising Abagana* with Robert van Mackelenberg who gave a dynamic performance as Blondon the tightrope walker when it was staged at the Hole.

Following it is a revival of Richard Beynon's naturalistic drama about the problems of Italian migrants in their new country, *The Shifting Heart*, and Milson will round off the year in Marian Street tradition with a musical. The innuendos of its title notwithstanding, *Once Upon a Matinée* is a zany American musical version of the fairytale of the princess and the pea.

For Marian Street audiences the months ahead should prove interesting ones. For Milson they mean foregoing profit his gypsy existence but he welcomes the opportunity they afford him of once again "contributing to a process of growth, an on-going concern."



State Theatre Company

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1981

AT THE PLAYHOUSE

SQUIRTS

A New Revue (1981)

Direction Neil Armfield

Design Stephen Curtis

Lighting Design Nigel Lovings

THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY

Cyril Tourneur (1606)

Direction Richard Cottrell

Set Design Richard Roberts

Costume Design Sue Russell

Music Jim Cotter

Lighting Design Nigel Lovings

NO END OF BLAME

Howard Barker (1981)

Direction John Geddes

Design Stephen Curtis

Lighting Design Nigel Lovings

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill (1928)

Translation Ralph Manheim and John Willett

Direction George Whaley

Musical Direction Michael Morley

Design Richard Roberts, Ken Wilby

Choreography Michael Fuller

Lighting Design Nigel Lovings

AT THE PRICE THEATRE

FANSHEN

David Hare (1975)

based on the book

by William Hinton

Direction Ken Boucher

Design Ken Wilby

Lighting Design Nigel Lovings

THE SAD SONGS OF ANNIE SANDO

Doreen Clarke (1981)

Direction Margaret Davis

Design Stephen Curtis

Lighting Design

Nigel Lovings

ACTORS APPEARING INCLUDE: Marilyn Allen, Tony Blackett, Simon Burke, Peter Cummins, Max Gillies, Daphne Grey, Jim Holt, Alan John, Iver Kent, Deborah Kennedy, Trevor Kent, Evelyn Krage, Jeannie Lewis, Stuart McCloskey, Robert Minogue, Karen Miles, Heather Mitchell, Dennis O'Brien, Philip Quast, John Saunders, Keith Spurr, Wendy Stinchcombe, John Turnbull, Jennifer West.

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY

— still sticking
its neck out



The Hunter Valley Theatre Company is the oldest of the non-capital city, regional theatre companies. Founded in 1976 it has suffered continuing financial difficulties and two severe breaks in continuity, but under the artistic directorship of Aune Neeme since 1988 has achieved the levels of artistic and crucial success and integration and involvement with the Newcastle region that has always been its ultimate objective.

And yet its problems continue. In a period when arts funding is scarce, regional companies find themselves in the position of nobody's baby, they are

neither major metropolitan companies drawing huge audiences, nor any longer considered a special project.

The central funding bodies, with their limited funds feel that the region rates above more public and private support if a truly wants its professional theatre company. In spite of stated personal support, Newcastle City Council's contribution to the running of HVTC amounts to what it considers "reduced" rental on the company's home, the Civic Playhouse. Although the company itself raised over \$150,000 and a dollar for dollar matching grant for the Premier's Department, for the complete conversion of the Council's old Wintergarden building, the Council still charge them some \$4,500 a year in rent. For an 11 night season at the big Civic Theatre the Council would make no reduction in their standard rental of \$43,800. The large companies based in Newcastle, like the Coal Board or BHP, make no significant donations to the theatre.

Aune Neeme and the Hunter Valley Theatre Company are at present doing their utmost to find the backing to retain the small but permanent company for the rest of the year. Neeme summed up why he sees this continuity as essential:

"The HVTC's biggest problem has always been, and still is, that we have never been adequately funded for what the Company sees as a necessity - a full-time, permanent professional theatre company for the region. The funding bodies cheerfully admit that, and go on to suggest, that it is irresponsible of us to attempt anything more than a limited season each year. But it is a question of philosophy and intent.

Our policy is to become a vital part of our community - a truly local professional company that gives expression and identity to, and gains expression and identity from the community it serves. It is the work apart from performances in the theatre, that largely contributes to the uniqueness of a regional company. How indeed can theatre people do justice to a community they never really contact?"

This requires a far greater involvement, commitment and loyalty from Company actors and staff alike, than would be possible from people engaged and imported for short periods. It

demands therefore, a substantial level of local employment throughout the Company. This is not possible without some modicum of job security, as there are no other professional opportunities in the region.

Peter Cheeseman puts it most succinctly: "The theatre is a potential public service... if the structure of relationships within the theatre allows participation by people with genuine and long term commitment to the outlet, and if these people can work on continuing research, on the evolution of new programmes, new styles, new formats, if writers can be involved and directors, actors, designers, and technicians can work together in risking the theatre play an invigorating, stimulating and significant role in community life, then I believe we are genuinely responding to the challenge of being the hired artists of a democratic society."

There is a Company, The Q Theatre, that approaches this idea, supported by reasonable subsidy (in 1981 \$226,000 compared to our actual \$95,000). Part of the rationale behind this assurance is that the Q requires special encouragement for an area (the outer western suburbs of Sydney) that is culturally deprived. The same argument can be made for the HVTC, who are doing similar pioneering work in a similar situation and on a similar scale.

Moreover Newcastle is the largest non-capital city in Australia, on the brink of massive growth and development. The theatre is a natural meeting place of all arts forms and we have a right to demand a company befitting our region's size, importance and contribution to the life and material progress of the state and the nation.

We are seeking sufficient subsidy so that our company's life can exist beyond the life and death of a season, that we can begin to ensure a community of approach and growth. We need more subsidy so that the company will not be obliged, in order to fill the theatre and improve its economic performance, to build up a superficially attractive but artistically insignificant repertoire, or at the very least to give economic emphasis to lightweight entertainment. It must be materially possible for the theatre to go in for experimentation, to adopt an innovative approach and to advance at the risk of something going array. **29**

CONFERENCE

Ken Harley sums up the 1981 Playwrights' Conference

I had a terrible dream last night. I dreamt that the committee that invited the Playwrights' Conference invented something else. I mean who would willingly immerse themselves in Canberra for a few weeks sentence, eat College Hakes, bed down in one's own fallout shelter, exchange bananans with damp students of Brewsterholme and listen the blasting of tyro writers in return for such an uncertain basket of cultural goodies? In spite of the Canberra insecticid, on any view of it the sixth National Playwrights' Conference, under Graeme Blundell's artistic direction must be adjudged a success.

These understudies are the Conference constants. This year there were some important changes which reflected the taste and style of the conference leadership. Less a benevolent despotism, more a Gang of Four with Blundell, Ron Blair (Chairman of the Playwriting Committee) and the administrators Janet and Donald McDonald pulling the strings. The stranglehold that Sydney had had on the Conference was broken by the advent of Cliff Green and Jack Hibberd from Melbourne's dramaturgs and Nick Enright as director and actor from Adelaide.

These fledgling playwrights that didn't get a guernsey perceived a change, a doctrinal backsliding in the choice of three out of the seven plays by so-called established writers — Dorothy Hewett Robert Adamson's *Zimmer*, *Variations* by Alma de Groot and *A Night in the Army of Berkley* by Clem German. The Conference has always had as its policy that plays by working playwrights should be welcomed. I am not aware of any flawed masterpiece that passed out because of the inclusion of these three writers. Even *Zimmer*, which suffered the loss of the sea changes, benefited by the process. (And "grooved" along with "metaphor" and "spine" soon hit the front as the buzz words of the



ALMA DE GROOT RETURNED TO WORK AT THE 1981 CONFERENCE.

Conference.) Without Blundell's professional antenarrus it is unlikely that these three plays would have presented themselves for workshopping. This should be remembered by those who seek to set limits to the initiative of the Conference's artistic director.

It is arguable, however, that since the Playbox Theatre, Melbourne had already announced its production of *Barberin*, that use of the functions of the Conference had been made irrelevant. Not that the play doesn't need work — it still does — but management had responded to it before the Conference by taking it on.

Zimmer gives further proof of the benefits of attracting so-called established playwrights. This play began about two years ago as the result of a Nutrod commission. Its progress was slow and when delivered to Nutrod they didn't jump immediately. I sense that the process for Alma de Groot is slow, private and often painful. If she had not been wooed by Blundell the script might have been long unused. Now it is to have a production by the Melbourne Theatre Company later this year. I sense that it is tougher, harder because of the contribution by Jack Hibberd, Alma's dramaturg. For my money it was the play that benefited most from workshopping and it al-

ready marks an advance on *Going Home*.

Originally Alma de Groot was to direct the workshopping of her own play (she had Bob Herbert with *Sea and Prose*). This renovation is admirable in principle, but didn't seem to work out in practice, with Alma passing the baton to Blundell and Hibberd. In the result the play was marvelously well served by its cast: Ramsey, Blundell, Moore and Hilton seem to be a磨合 for the first production.

As part of the resolve to serve the writers, more plays were received and reported on (191), more plays workshopped (7) and more plays were read in the evenings (16). Blair, with some of the dramaturgs, Christine Johnson and



EXPERIENCED WRITERS RON BLAIR AND JACK HIBBERD WORKED AS DRAMATURGS.

Alan John, invited scripts from the observers and discussed their plays with them. Each year it has been gleefully said that the process is null, that the end product is not important. This year it came close to happening. Two exceptions, quite different in their way, illustrate the problem.

The first, *Zimmer*, began life as

ENCÉVILLE

Zimmer's Exile by ex-prison writer Robert Adamson with journalist Bruce Haasford. Thus Dorothy Hewitt collaborated with Adamson on his script. I guess that Hewitt gave some theatrical shape to Adamson's raw material. I suggest that it was probably almost ready for production before the Conference. What we got, despite all our protestations, was a partly realised production with something approaching a performance by Blandell as Zimmer with little change in the text. As it is, it encroaches the same territory as the earlier Jim McNeil plays such as *Frontier Justice*. I find the romantic view of Zimmer as an crusader bit hard to take. The sweetest irony of the Conference occurred in the discussion

Herbert's *Sex and Violins*, directed within an inch of its life by the author. When first submitted this sex comedy had no music. The director first stated to direct it (and who had to drop out later) suggested the addition of songs, which the author and Sharon Rischke created, brilliantly, but I think inelegantly. This was a case of the author too willing to please wanting to please everyone. Opinions were sharply divided

sure who the settings are intended to serve. Discussion of agents, royalties, telling and such are irrelevant to the new writer trying to get his play on and known by the established writer. It was good to have a seminar unanimously resolve that the Opera and Ballet ought to compete (and be accountable) for grants in the same way as the other theatre companies.

Two plays emerged from the readings which ought to be taken up as new play by young Adelaide writer Angela Fawcett, *Most Extraordinary* and a comedy about cynicism by actor Craig Cronin, *Five Cents Above The Smiths*.

Frank Moorhouse and Donald Horne will be pleased to know that the basic conference rules were observed although there was a certain slackness in the second week about name tags. Sharon Rischke was as brilliant at the piano after dinner as she was in the rehearsal room. The only unperformed piece I'd like to have seen was Jack Hibberd's *The Aviator*, written in response to the Namrod Soviets. The stock characters were all present. Brian Sweeney, the stage drunkard, ripped off a few one-liners and then went off to lunch with Jim Killen. The Cuban Revolutionary burned a few ears. Bob Ellis' last night aria was unnecessarily morbid. And it still seems to be a mark for ex-prison playwrights



ANDREW GAMMIE, DIRECTOR, *ENCÉVILLE*, REHEARSING IN DOROTHY HEWITT'S PLAY *ZIMMER*.

ed about the selection of this potentially "commercial" piece — the social realism from Namrod being the natural. So in this case, the people began the getting on of a musical, rather than removing some of the fatigues in the script. Its solid basis in theatrical craft will ensure a wider audience after its premiere at the Stables.

The *Death of Will* by Canberra poet Frank McKone illustrates the value of the Conference in allowing original and difficult work to be seen. It is a short, black and sometimes impenetrable piece that offers no concession to Stanislavskian naturalism. Its presentation is unlikely to be taken up by professional theatre but McKone is encouraged to write a second play.

The various seminars have been covered in the daily press, including the debate between the Namrod Soviets and the pluralists led by Blunt. I'm not

afraid of *Zimmer*. After the argy bargy about plays that were sexist, agent, an enthusiast from the audience praised *Zimmer* for making a positive statement about gay rights. And this comment about a play in which *Zimmer* sells his boyfriend down the river for a packet of Durex?

The second exception was Bob

PLAYS WORKSHOPPED WITH:
Butterflies of Katsamont by Kate Bawden, director, Alison Sweeney, dramaturg, Barry Oakley
Vocations by Alan de Groot, dramaturg, Jack Hibberd
Half and Half by Richard Petherington, director, Ken Horler, dramaturg, Cliff Green
Sex and Violins by Bob Herbert, dramaturg, Margot Hilton
Zimmer by Dorothy Hewitt, director, Nick Berney, dramaturg, Jack Hibberd
Death of Will by Frank McKone, director, Ken Horler, dramaturg, Barry Oakley

COME OUT

Chris Westwood
looks at the '81
Youth Festival of
Arts

Flying above the median strips in Adelaide are huge coloured flags made by kids to celebrate COME OUT - a unique youth festival of arts. This festival festival is not unique for its emphasis on young people alone but because it is not run by an artistic director as such, having instead a committee which puts into effect the proposals from hundreds of submissions by kids, professional arts companies, organisations and teachers.

For those who still mistakenly believe committees can only create ugly and aesthetically unsatisfying results, COME OUT proves the opposite. The '81 festival is full of humour, inspiration, enthusiasm, commitment, professionalism, energy, wit and skill.

Many theatre workers visiting COME OUT are frankly amazed at the depth, range and quality of the entertainment presented. Perhaps this is because COME OUT has concentrated its limited resources into "people and not things", as Penny Chapman points out. The theatreside of the programme can be divided up into shows by adults for kids (such as *Golden Falls*, the MAGPIE State Theatre of SA's contribution, to be viewed elsewhere in this magazine) or shows using kids with professional adult help (such as the Australian Dance Theatre or State Opera's



Chris Westwood and the young performers at the '81 Youth Festival of Arts.

involvement) or shows in which the substantive effort in all areas by kids (all performances in the "Over To Youth" programme). Obviously it was not possible for me to cover all 40 arts performances presented each day, so I have simply selected one or two outstanding examples in each category.

For me, however, the most interesting work was in the "Over To Youth" programme for that is where kids tell the truth as they see it - a truth tougher, more resilient, more perceptive than adults generally want to acknowledge. Themes picked up included coming to terms with the relationship of male to real life (Annual Hawker), growing up female and Anglo-Celtic (*Meat Hollow* examining the myths of stardom (superhero) or dreaming, flying and freedom (Sharing). The latter production an ensemble directed by

Gale Edwards with students and ex-students of Morsala High School. Gale credits to the theory that youth performing groups have great potential to present new forms of theatre which rely more on their imagination and energy than "second-rate imitations of traditional theatre" says Andrea Bleby, the Festival Centre's Education Officer.

In each of these productions, the energy, discipline and dedication of the kids and the capability to excellent direction by the few adults involved provide very powerful theatre. The kids in the audiences are much harsher critics on their peers than we joint adults, always ready to pull down what they see as "weak" in ideas or execution, and this harshness contributes to the high standards throughout the whole COME OUT programme.

Where adults are involved in mounting productions with kids, the quality of their work is perhaps more obvious (not its strengths and weaknesses) than in an adult production. *Eggs* and *40 The Kangaroo* are cases in point. *Eggs*, a dance drama piece (with tennis music by John Succosky), is a contribution either by Australian Dance Theatre (adults) and Mumon's Little Darlings (kids). Devised and directed by Angie Taylor, choreographed by Jonathan Taylor and designed by the inspired Sylvia Hartnett, this whole piece comes together as a spectacular and amazing piece of theatre, in which children are not exploited and adults' talents are given open and generously. Much of the success of *Eggs* is due to the plot, for it allows adults to play adults, and children to play children, in a manner which makes a powerful and provocative statement.

Set in the future are two tribes, one composed entirely of adults (who centuries ago chose immortality for themselves over child bearing) and living separately, a tribe of children (who are unfortunately born from giant spiky eggs). One of the adult tribe holds a doll thing "like a child", their patriarch demands that it be burnt in line with their "no children" principle, and it is thrown into a fire (which palpably horrifies the children in the audience). A slightly older child arrives on the scene and dances with the adults - a wonderful scene of the vulnerability and charm of children

and the indulgent explosive side of adults.

The adults follow the child, in a spectacular optimistic procession to the children's tribe. Babies are舞ed with gymnastic dancing and quiet moving movements during which some adults thoroughly examine the eggs. The adults are beaten back by the children. One of the eggs did not open, so an older child breaks it apart and lets out a tiny lamp baby, dead from the adults' touching the eggs. The children finally repel and expel the adults. The strength of this latter must give adults in the audience a real fright and children, a rush of power. Anne Taylor is World-class in children and dance - it is a great pity we can't see her work except in Australia.

—49 The Army Men on the other hand, shows what is not good about adults working with kids. While Richard Rodney Bennett's music is stunning, the opera says little of significance; the direction has the kids "sound and deliver" and the usually strong set overwhelms the whole production. For the State Opera of S.A. this should be a model.

Commissioning appropriate work might do wonders for opera for or by or with children. On the subject of music (and clearly the kids in it) The *Keep* *New* greatly enjoyed singing and playing in it; special "awards" should go to Alan Barnell and Diana Patterson for their general contribution to the high quality of music education in SA and their specific excellent work with the young in music. *COME OUT* show.

One of the striking features of this COME OUT festival is that most "theatre" combines language, dance music and mime. Who taught young people, growing up with such implements and preparedness to mix art forms, think of the stodgy and didactic presentations so often presented on the "adult" stage around the country? Will they demand a freer theatre? Will they seek theatres which offer productions of greater accessibility, namely and instantly?

Interestingly some of the early COME OUT kids from 1973 continue running events in the festival. Penny Chapman says there were lots of a gap between adults and kids involved in COME OUT, so much so

as though "14 year olds are not the next generation anymore" and certainly an ideological consensus prevails at the COMF OUT Club. While some figures of Australia's establishment theatre may find an awareness of urban issues and class both offensive and irrelevant, it is clear that the hundreds of kids and adults involved in COMF OUT do speak directly about the current social and economic situation in an extraordinarily enterprising manner.

The tasks of the next COME OUT festival, according to Penny Chapman will include working through the tensions between "excellence and accessibility" and "looking more at defining what art and art events mean to young people". She feels that COME OUT's priorities should include "making more room for enabling the best and most inspired adults we can find in the industry to work with kids - particularly those who have never done it before". She cites Dorothy Hewitt and Babs Jamen's excellent contributions in writing and design, and looks forward to similar integrations of drama/arts and direction, music, design, and more.

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VALEDICTION TO YOUTH

(The following is the text of my 1981 speech to the Playwrights' Conference in Canberra, which coincided with my 29th birthday and Malcolm Fraser's quarrel with the Premiers.

The Conference, like, like always, was the year marked by the potent presence of the Women's Movement who among other things were furiously opposed to Bob Hawke's musical comedy *Sex and Violence*, in which a man with a stiletto licks his three hours to get a fuck, and the once-impassioned poet Bob Adamson, who did a lot of yelling at malcontents and on one occasion punched his dressing Ken Herler in the eye. Harry Radau, also known as Cape York Harry, was a participant for Caxton and now lives peacefully in North Queensland. His plays collectively titled *Let Marion Cross Her Over A Year*, unaged the Women's Movement, and so did Clem Greenman's play *At Night In The Avon* of racism, about a bogger' station twenty years after Brian Stanaway, head of the Theatre Board, is a former horse-tamer and Cossack soldier from Brisbane, and possessor of a few drunken barrows. Rob Page and Lucy Wagner, editors of *Theatre Australia*, published that same week, in order of importance, a list of Australia's top thirty playwrights, in which I came above Tim John Howard, in which I came above Tim John Howard is an actor with a big jaw.

GRAEME BLUNDRELL: At roughly And now, the man you've all been waiting for, that well-known star of stage, screen, journalism and cardiac arrests, Bob Ellis.

(Applause, groans, etc.)

ELLIS (winks): *Chandlery underlined* I come before you, broken man, with a heart pacer and recording groans, an empty gazing couch and barely outlasting Chekhovian hags, slightly gaunt — this very week to the third eleven of Australian playwriting by these stern but just founders of our former national art form, Rob Page and Lucy Wagner, the *Joan and Evans* Person of *Bulimba* — though makes ahead of course of mere Barry Humphries, who didn't get a mention, clearly *inflated* for pompos, and a wrypath threat to the natural Darwinian predominance of New Zealanders, academics and Poems — and drowning through this my final analysis of the better days of Burton Hall, and the bangers and

mach and porties interruptions and forthcoming strands of a now forgotten era of simple personal and pagan values, now gone like forever, before the noxious sugaras inflated the world.

My close friend Malcolm Fraser and I have had a hard week, both of us left, enigmatic men with gaping dwarves at our backs, pressing on regardless with our vision of the necessary future of man, but we have had our little worries. I was caught on a breakfast quest with Chris Woodwood, and had to forgo a cigarette for fear of ideological attack, and Malcolm, in the seventh day of his struggle against the stomach, and the fourteenth week of his sleepless quest for someone who would smile at him, was obliged to have lunch with Brian Sweeney the male equivalent of the Duke of Bath, who jiggled the salt cellar, wiped that he, as head of the Arts Council be given a cocaine licence, sang "Ain't Laundry" with an impromptu quartet of heterosexual waitresses and fell under the table well before the fish. The Prime Minister is reported to have said, looking down admiringly, "I think I understand that man. Can we give him the ABC?"

I have had my work cut out, in my secret capacity of CIA doubleholder for paranoid materials. To everybody qualified but me, Bob Adamson on Monday night went on a hunger strike, refusing all alcohol until the Conference accorded him the status of political prisoner. It took me long hours to comfort him that Little Red Riding Hood was not nuts to the wolf, and the yellow brick road did lead to a happy kingdom of flying sheep and lemon dragon trees, and all would be well if he closed his eyes. He was grateful for the information. On Tuesday I had to replace the visiting air hostesses with the visiting members of the Women's Movement, who agreed to serve tea and biscuits in protest for redress in airline rights on first-class passengers. I told the gaengromine was necessary to stop the country from grinding to a halt, and diplomacy is my foremost talent. On Wednesday at mid-night a violent break out when Helen Morse relieved the leading role in a feminist movie called *Castles See The Light*, to co-star Diane Fraser as her strong, sugaras, firm, proud, embossed, pink-skinned pub-crawling lover, and several bodies were broken. I dealt with the situation brilliantly by shooting rape in another room so they all came in to watch

On Thursday Dorothy Hewett was arrested under Canberra law for methinking before breakfast, an activity said to be economically destabilising, and for transgressing a dangerous weapon across state lines. The dangerous weapon Bob Adamson, on reaching port and "Home at last" and refused to leave despite an offer from all twenty-five members of at least thousand dollars if he would do so immediately. I secured them both a Prime Ministerial pardon after making Dorothy promise to write with Moja a musical play on the matter of *Chapel Review*, called *Pumpkin's Progress* on the life of Senator Flit.

But my Herculean efforts to preserve law and order was taking its toll. By Thursday morning I was showing signs of plague and severity. Over lunch I met with Leonard Radis for Bob Adams and thanked him kindly for the money. By mid-afternoon I was sitting early in Maths Thrash and bushily asking Ron Blair for his autograph. I had a few jabs and by four o'clock was offering the starring role in *GoodFor Powder* to incoming members of socialist longue women and failing to get their seven numbers. I began to worry about myself. At the end of my odyssey and after CIA operations like *Wingfield* or *Khanda* as we put it best with the Company have come to know and love him come down with poor signs of the ergotism in mid-polygamy and was carried off singing that "He condition was diagnosed as compound and a singlephore, a dictaphone and for instance of Guy Ranson set up by VFL jet to have him across to the other shore" I found a rough beeching and "I may have drunk a little myself, because that night I thought I saw Graeme Blundell acting brilliantly, and Bob Adamson looking thoughtful, and mark, and attentive. The rest of that strange night I spent for the very first time with a girl I proposed to on Wyrong Station in 1982, and did not make notes. I knew I was cracking up.

By noon I was having sudden, inexplicable, swift, recurring visions of Jim Killen and Margaret Galloyle making love, and Malcolm Fraser admiring them forward in their sugaras exertions with the aid of a metronome. The vision abruptly changed to a nightmarish Bugs Bunny Show with Blundell as Bugs, Cliff Green as Elmer Fudd, Rob Page as Daffy Duck and Harry Read as Yosemite Sam.

My condition swiftly deteriorated, and that night I submitted to a full Whirlwind medical fiasco of test and pretests and sex appeal, with no redeeming social value that would make ten million dollars for no product; and Richard Wherrett turned it down, and the glib, hemphed author offered it to me. I woke up yesterday suffering in a cold and unnatural sweat. My surgeon told me the worst: I had caught the Hibbert disease, and said the end might be a little postponed if I took off weight, and recommended adultery. I gave the fatty, knew a bunch of farts, and said I would sooner die, so when Barbara Stephens and Helen Morse come clattering at my door again tonight, with their usual breathy, multi-soft promises of three-way bubble baths and home-cooked apple pies and smooches by the fire, they will know what angry answer to expect from this maimed and dying man.

I would be take home my Lord, of a better world, for all around I see a shocking desolation. The Revolutionary Army of the Virgin Mary, now recharged the National Theatre, is putting on, as its first Recitation of the Classics Series, a show called *Person of the Month*, or *Person of the Person*, in which Miguel Cervantes is summoned to appear before the Inquisition's principal investigator, Chico Westwood, played by Miss Piggy in a hideous wigs and skin and charged with having written a metho novel

in which the hero packs a sword and battles dragons and finds an encircling reputation that woman are less than peccadillo. He is required when he agrees to make Quixote build his own into a victory bell and march up in Dulcinea's brocade. As the second of the series, *Guerrillas*, Eric Coriolanus, played by Alton De Groot, is kicked to death in severe use for being frank with the enemy by her ideologically sound critics who then, for the next three hours, justify their action with the aid of shreds and delusions, while Leon, diagnosed as dead in a cage, undergoes resuscitation while Mammie

The theatre of course I will always miss the most. Stephen Schiff's new play, *Suffragettes*, told from the vegetarian point of view Dorothy Newark's new coming exciting of combinations, gentry and proletarian delight, *The Balcony* that and *Death of a Salesman*, Steve Speirs' *Dick Smith* which establishes one and for all Duffy Cook as the true genius behind Bugs Bunny's success. *Clown* Cormann's new comedy, *A Night in The Old Forest*, in which at a AIDS reunion twenty years after John Bell, Ben Horler, Richard Wherrett, Ron Blair, Rob Ellis, John Gaden, Bruce Bessford, Dick Brennan, Germaine Greer and Mr Justice Kirby find they have nothing much in common any more. A new play by Bob Herbert, a wacky medical act in an abortion clinic called *Mirr* and *Grave*, in which Barbara

Stephens keeps bairring at her pregnant and the doctor falls in love. And last but not least a play about the Playwrights' Conference by David Williamson, called *A Day At The Old Commissariat*, which is set in Higgins' office and involves again the well behaved Rev. Greville, who probably out-consummated this time, having a secret stash of prostitutes while everyone discusses prostitutes by work.

But, of course, I sit on this marshy place of dreams among the leafy hills where my utmost pleasure is yearly found. It is said, I think, that the last year of our lives goes clearly over, even for Robin Rattray, who has served too long as Bob Adsett's Dennis Grey. Have brought us to the irreconcilable place, where comrades are trivial, and humour, and lust, and drunkenness, and thought we by inches change the hearts of the world to better hearts or bad.

I am thirty-one today, having attained Jack Benny's majority, and I feel every bit as healthy, and half, as he does tonight. My children I may not bring by with you. I must be about my father's business — in the grocery store in Murwillumbah — but if thanks are in order from the third down and twists can still be drunk to larger things, I would only like to conclude as I have before, in Yeats's usual words:

Ask not where man's glory lies

Begin and end,

Not say my glory was, I had such friends.



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INSTINCT & QUALITY

Gratine Murphy talks to Bill Shoubridge about the SDC's road to success.

"People have said that the Sydney Dance Company is parochial," said Gratine Murphy in an interview prior to the U.S. tour, "but then so is the New York City Ballet or the Royal Ballet, they're all parochial and it's that which makes them stand out from others, it's that which makes us an internationally viable company."

"If we had gone trying to give New York what nearly every other dance group gives, well, they wouldn't have found out that much about us. And since we never had behind a big name here at home I see no reason why we should do it anywhere else."

All members of the Sydney Dance Company have a strong pride and sense of unique identity in themselves and, more than anything else, it's due to the fact that they have built up a mass of ballets created especially for them and by them. It's companies like ours that even more now that the heavy critics of the New York dance scene have reacted so positively to them and singled out Murphy as a major talent on an international market.

But all of this didn't happen overnight, it has been a cumulative and organic growth going steadily on since Murphy first took over the job as Artistic Director back in 1976.

"I hardly knew what I had inherited when I took over the reins," says Murphy. "I knew some of the (then) repertoire and some of the dances, but that was it, and I certainly wasn't about to go making big changes in that that I was quite new to. These changes only happened slowly as the ballets I was choreographing and commissioning began to enter the repertoire. No one was sacked, but certain dancers left to



Left: Gratine Murphy — Above: (l to r) Alvin Ailey, Graeme Murphy, and Geraldine Turner in the Sydney Dance Company's *Ain Dervish*. Photo: Brigitte Lemoine.

try elsewhere and others joined us. As far as style goes, I wanted a more classical technique than what had been used before, even though I pulled and stretched it to meet my specifications.

"I never wanted a uniformity of style or 'look'. I liked a dancer and thought I could use them. I engaged them and they knew they would be given greater creativity in the roles and works made for them. That brought about a change, the dancers felt that their role in rehearsals was substantial, that they weren't bodies just there to be manacured."



So if there is no set style, or look, or technique, is there a policy?

"You don't need to build a company on a policy book, that's restrictive. There's never been a policy of 'Australian works only', we've always done the works that we think the Company is ready for at the time. All one has to do is keep the dancers happy, increase your audiences through quality work and follow your own instincts. All the rest, the style, the artistic direction and so

on will automatically follow, with the help of good administration and staff of course."

It seems to be a recipe that has held the SDC in good stead so far and what has helped bring them to pre-eminence in Australian dance. It is also what has helped them build up a large and devout following.

"Some people might think that we're going to New York to prove ourselves to ourselves, but that's not true," says Murphy summarily. "We have enough pride in ourselves already. What we are going for is to have a unique repertoire seen in the dance capital of

overseas will do anything to change the unyielding attitude of certain theatre management in Sydney. The SDC has to go more or less cap in hand to get a booking in that city and even then that isn't sure. A regrettable state of affairs when one considers that other performing groups with far less imagination and creativity are firmly entrenched in their theatres and snug in their offices, while the SDC still isn't sure of a new home when they have to move out of their Woolloomooloo premises later this year.

"We know from the *An Evening* season at the Opera House that we can fill theatres" notes Murphy. "85% capacity is good in anyone's book. And we know that larger audiences are coming to see us, their interest piqued by names like *Sherkarakoo* and *Daphne and Chloe*. We don't track them on those names, we're honest and subsequently they return to us, suggesting things that otherwise they wouldn't have accepted. What is aggravating is that management still see us as a risk, even at the Opera House which is supposed to be our 'Home'. The major houses there (Australian Ballet and Opera) get first priority. Commercial management want a long, safe musical play. We can put in a pencil booking and they will sit on it, but if anything else comes along that looks more promising then we're edged out. It's come to such a pass that if we don't get a theatre soon, well, we just won't be seen in Sydney again until God knows when."

"We as a Company love to perform and we love to communicate and that's one of the reasons why we tour. We did it last year with the Italian tour and it will be the same on the American tour. Not just the hands across the water nonsense, but new audiences, different cultures. Performing is exciting, it's like meeting new friends or a new lover and heaven knows, Sydney is where we live and where we want to perform most of the time."

"But there are other reasons why we tour or prefer long seasons. Dancers develop and grow much more quickly in conditions like that. A tour is hard and rigorous and the dancers just blossom. In Italy last dancers develop almost overnight because of the demands placed upon them. In a long season everyone gets a chance to expand, there are other people in

They're so brave, an unknown company bringing an unknown repertoire by unknown choreographers, without even a star to pull in crowds..." "... You just can't categorize them, there's nothing to compare them with..." "The difference and variety of their rep is stunning... the dancers are so strong, so beautiful and strong..." "They've had a bigger advance booking than anything at the Center this year." "God, even Martha Graham stopped to clap which she never does..." "The Company is a powerhouse and Murphy is a major talent..."

Left: and modern company after the Balinese Dancer Company (see interview on page 100). Below: Gert Gruen

the world, to make Australian audiences sit up and take notice (because a lot of them still think it's not much good and it has had the impression from overseas) and more importantly to attract a greater amount of private sponsorship, which is important to us. We're not so foolish as to assume that the money is going to keep automatically rolling in from the Government funding bodies and that is why we've been in this area. Dance especially has done more to attract private enterprise than any other performing art in Australia recently."

One wonders if the attention from

Continued page 101

THE EVOLUTION OF A

Brian Thomson talks to Robert Page

Brian Thomson's career as a stage and film designer are ones that must be the envy of many. From his first association with Jim Sharman in Sydney in the sixties to his current Associate Directorship of the Sydney Theatre Company, he seems to have combined his considerable talents with the admirable faculty of being in the right place at the right time with the right idea. He is one of the few people who can truly say 'I've never done anything I didn't want to do' and who has managed to preserve this integrity along with an unflaggingly successful career.

When he gave up his architecture studies at the University of NSW, Thomson saw himself as an environmental artist. He hawked around his "Environmental Kit" — "boxes which contained various elements which helped you participate in whatever activity it was supposed to be associated with" — and haunted the experimental discotheque at 10 Cunningham Street, which became known for its environmental "happening". He was mainly interested in the idea of art in everyday contexts and new ways of introducing it to people, theatre seemed to him remote and old fashioned and in no way connected with the likes he wanted to pursue.

A five minute chat with Jim Sharman in a hamburger joint changed that entirely.

Having tried to sell Sharman an Environmental Kit as they waited in the queue, Brian Thomson expected nothing further from the encounter. He was amazed to get a phone call from Harry Miller and a request, on the strength of a recommendation

from Jim, to decorate the foyer of the Metro for *Man Art* in a foyer conceived well with his concept of art in unusual contexts, but again he anticipated no follow-through — he wasn't that keen on the show anyway, thought it could have been more hard-edged.

But Sharman kept in contact. First he got Thomson to design plans for a production of *Tosca* that was scheduled for the Melbourne Playbox, but never went on. In 1970, though, it was exciting enough for Thomson to be commissioned and paid for his work. He couldn't have been more surprised to be asked next to design a production of *As You Like It* for Jim Sharman at the Old Tote, the combination of Shakespeare and the seemingly stand organisation hardly seemed to fit with his interests or ideas, but he read the play, came up with a concept and was amazed to be told to go ahead and make it happen.

"The art students there thought I was some arty farty rabbag at first, they didn't realise that my training as an architect and other work meant I did know exactly how to do it. Theatre that time had never embraced materials like metal and perspex, which seemed ridiculous and to me the natural way to go. It was marvellous to be paid to do what I wanted to do, and to have the people to physically put my ideas together. When it comes to actually building I don't have the patience. I can spend six or eight weeks working on a model, but not the full sized thing."

As You Like It was a success and provided another call from Harry Miller, this time with a request to design the new production of *Man*. Thomson was able to go to town on the environmental angle and surrounded a plethora of household junk with an enormous marigold and green effect. From there he was invited back to the Tote and created the stunning

look of Richard Wherrett's *Amara O!* Design his initial reaction to the company, he points out, was Southgate and Roba Lovejoy's support of his work at the time as a major influence and encouragement. He did other work for them and then designed *Jesus Christ Superstar* which eventually led him to London.

"It was interesting doing *Superstar*. I always had a great naivete about theatre and the institution involved with it, so it wasn't at all daunting for me to be working in the West End with all those people. It wasn't until later that I realised the whole theatre industry in Britain is just geared to doing what we were doing — but we just stepped off the plane and did the production."

Brian Thomson received several offers in London, "but they were more crassly commercial than *Superstar*, and I turned them down, to my agent's annoyance. There was a terrible musical thing with Tony Newley, I knew that was what theatre meant, but there was no way that was ever going to touch me — even if I didn't work too bad, there were other things I could get on and do."

What he did do was work at the Royal Court on Shepard's *The Dumb Hand* in which Sharman had cast Richard O'Brien. From O'Brien's compositions and singalongs round the piano came *The Rock Horror Show* which entrepreneur Michael White decided to mount after he had heard four bars.

While he had been working for the Tote, Thomson had designed the film *Shades of Grey* and *the Alibi* which combined his loves of science fiction and rock and which he could follow through in *Rocky*. "We applied a consciously trashy level to it, although at first Richard wanted it to be very slick. But we had a budget of about £300 and we could have spent all that on one good stage. The opening

DESIGNER

image of the spoilt teenager girl I got from seeing it in a real cinema. Frankenfurter's costumes were converted from the Glasgow Citizens' production of *The Mask* — everyone involved put in a great deal.

"The opening night was one of the most exciting nights ever. Vincent Price and Coral Browne had been working at the Court Downstairs and they came up to see *Rocky*. They went back stage afterwards, having loved it, which was as exciting as he was one of the greats of the old trashy horror movies. At the same time I was working on *Antony and Cleopatra* with Vanessa Redgrave which had

made any money out of it yet?"

The Rocky Horror Picture Show gave Thomson even greater scope for creating a total environment, and the sequel, *Shock Treatment*, soon to be released, has continued that, allowing him to build a whole TV studio in Lee Studios, London, where the entire movie was shot after the US actors' strike shattered plans to shoot on location in America.

When *Death In Venice* for the Adelaide Festival came up, Thomson had never been to an opera before. He went to see *Lulu* at the Paris Opera. "I waited for the greatest thing I could ever see. It was truly the most

"I also worked on the acoustics of the set with *Death In Venice*, which succeeded remarkably. At the first run people thought there was amplification

and there was, in the act itself. I think it's the best thing that Jim and I have done as a team."

As part of his work for the Sydney Theatre Company he has just designed *Lulu*, Chicago and shortly *Chichester For Chicago* (I like the Sydney Theatre Company, as a serious theatre, should do it in a manner where we respond to the work, the text, like any other good show, rather than as a burly theatre musical. I think it makes the interpretation and the characters a lot gayer and there may well be deeper ramifications than in other productions I've seen of it. Richard's aim is to make the STC an 'actors' company so the set must work to make the actors work — it's a more focussing approach. We decided to make it monochromatic until the final scene and having decided to do it like that we've had to be uncompromising.

"With *Lulu*, the approach was again metaphorical rather than specifically placed. It's basically a series of arches which are all curving at the final scene. You need to feel a person as low as they can go, yet in an environment that's epic and overpowering. Society will always squash people like *Lulu*. Louis (Nordahl) thought it looked very Albert Speer and it does use classic architectural forms devoid of decorative detail, as they did in the Bauhaus era."

Part of Thomson's arrangement with the Sydney Theatre Company is that he will direct a show for them at the end of the year, thus fulfilling one of his ambitions. "Finally I do want to move on to directing. I understand much, I've done it for ten years and maybe that's enough. I want to do an opera in the Paris Opera sometime and I want to design a film that's made in Hollywood."

If *Shock Treatment* is anything like the success that *Rocky Horror* has become, offers from Hollywood are a strong possibility, and as for the Paris Opera, they've already had an exhibition of the *Death In Venice* set and costumes in the foyer. Most of all, with Brian Thomson's luck and talent he is more than likely to continue his ten year tradition of doing what he wants to do.



opened two days earlier!"

The progress of *The Rocky Horror Show* is now history: it played continuously in London at various venues until 1980 and gave Brian Thomson the opportunity to go to Norway, Japan and the USA to design the international productions. He has supplied designs for Wilson Markby's revival here in September, but offers a caution about its potential success. "Rocky's never worked when people have been greedy. It has its own, built-in way of earning back profit through needing small theatres and big overheads. Harry Miller claims not to have

accusating, wonderful piece of theatre I've ever seen, so I attacked *Death In Venice* in the same way. It was all in the music so there was no point in visually evoking Venice, no need for detail. I'm not at all interested in restoration, I've never done a box set and I never will. Even with *Big Top, Cleo, Soul and Pendulum's Cross* there was no need. I am very interested in reality, though, like junk. I don't think we appreciate our world enough, not even the technology and if you put things on stage it allows people to really look at them in a different context.

THE EVOLUTION OF A DESIGN

Director, Roger Pulvers, comments on
Dance of Death at Melbourne's Playb

These drawings are, for me, contributions for a production. A design is always a comment on a play, whether it intends to go as far as Peter Brook's designs are possible.

The ideas in the drawings reiterate throughout all aspects of the final concrete result. The more frequently strong, the often more becomes a comment - but by no means controlling - the acting space around the audience.

An offstage (and translation less, I suppose) I am tempted, never that the production is on stage, to think. Peter's visual statements were very those in the play. This is the area in which designer and director must collaborate fully, so that the visual and verbal become indistinguishable. When I look back on a play like *Death*, I am surprised when I can't remember whether it is words that I saw or images that I heard.

Unfortunately, I can, by looking these images to hand, only be disengaging them. They stand on their own. They compromise what Tedesco, Kuntor called "the plastic direction of the play".



ON DESIGN

Peter Corrigan's designs for his production of *The*



THE CUFF-FACE Corrigan: The implication here is that acting in the Dance of Death might be seen as a dangerous or threatening pastime. Rather like performing on a narrow mountain path in the Andes. Pulver: Here I feel a real risk, whose brutality and insight force us to stretch what we can acceptably. What we deem logically credible. "I don't die as easily. Don't celebrate prematurely. Alice." (Edgar)

THE DANCE FLOOR

Corrigan: The dance around the audience is here viewed as a magic ritual. The closing of a circle or a magic ring. An act of European voodoo. Pulver: The dance floor with the middle taken out. A dance of death around the edges of a live audience.

"And I will do his dance...and wear a laurel wreath in my hair, a sign of triumph." (Alice)

THE EVOLUTION OF A DESIGN

THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE
Corrigan: The audience is at the calm or centre of the storm. Pulverise the audience perpetually in the centre, or only temporarily?
"Everyone who comes here turns evil... then goes his way." (Edgar)



THE WEIGHT OF THE PISTONS
Corrigan: The existing mezzanine in the upstairs Playbox space was intended to feel heavy, as if the performance existed in a clamp or vice. Pulverise characters caught under anti-created and self-perpetuated burdens.
"The easier hard anyone, except myself." (Alice)

Peter Corrigan's original designs for *The Dance of Death* were displayed at the Australian Perspecta 1981 exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW during June. Corrigan was the only stage designer (as well as the only architect) represented in the exhibition.

Different roles all the time."

It's one of the thumbprints of the SDC that when you look at the dancers, you see a group of truly individual talents performing coherently, so different from the grey, faceless ensembles that one sees so often in dance these days.

"Some companies and repertoires require that 'grey, faceless ensemble,'" answers Murphy, "but that company and rep always comes to life when there is a performer strong enough to put their stamp on it." People say, "Wasn't that a fabulous baller?" when what they actually saw was a good ballet danced with real personality.

"We're not in showbiz" says Murphy, warning to his team: "We're in the business of communication and enlightenment through that communication. I think the SDC has broken down a lot of those former barriers because there's an immediacy about the Company that's refreshing. That 'honesty' in the art has a lot to do with encouraging audience interest."

All of which is true and so far so good, but does Murphy ever see the day when he'll want to leave the Company



Show from SDC - *An Evening Piece* Aurora Goya

and flee across oceans, attracted by the golden board of more money and greater fame?

"Well it is true that I've had offers to choreograph on various companies overseas, most specifically the Stuttgart Ballet," answers Murphy. "But really what does that 'golden board' mean? A five week period at a time, working with dancers you're not familiar with, unaware of their unique gifts and strengths, waiting on the platform of the Miles to go from expectation to the

other. When I have been with the Sydney Dance Company it is the most special thing one could hope for, a chance to really stretch one's talents. I would accept some commissions from other companies because I think it is occasionally important to work with different dancers, and I would like my work to be seen elsewhere, but the knowledge that one has a home income back is important."

"You know, dance today, in Australia and elsewhere, is in such a vibrant and healthy state. Time was when people just wanted to do the 'big' roles, the Swan or Aurora, but now people want parts and roles specifically created on them. Natalia Makarova for example, is always casting around for someone to create a role on her. As long as that happens, as long as there's, with all that crowd-pulling ability won't today's automobile to ride in thanks, not yesterday's, then dance won't, can't stagnate."

"And the same goes for audiences today too, they want new stuff, a constant diet of the classics is stultifying to them, and that is the best news yet."



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MUSICAL COMEDY
NICK X TERRY
ENRIGHT CLARKE
DIRECTED JOHN BELL

DESIGNED BY STEPHEN CURTIS
CHOREOGRAPHED BY MARCY HAYES & KATH BAIN
WITH VALERIE BADER, ANNIE BYRON,
JON EWING, ALIBA JOHNSON, BARRY
LOVETT, CORPON McDougall, JOHN
MCERNAN, TONY SHELDON, TONY TAYLOR

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INTERNATIONAL

U.S.A.

Send in the (local) clowns

by Karl Levett

Despite the relentless escalation of international communication in the world entertainment industry, there remains one stubborn necessity: Comedy must be local. This is particularly true in the theater, where even the various English-speaking clowns have great difficulty in conveying the same language.

Comedy is the wine that doesn't travel well and it's much safer to stick to the local vintage, as they say. Alan Ayckbourn may make it to National Theatre in London, but he stumbles on Broadway. Ned Season who is a demon with dollars hardly gains a point in London. The Australian playwright sees both these gentlemen and their alien coarseness as poison. Ah, what a fragile thing is comedy. (There's a gift of a Master's thesis in all this for somebody.)

Along with its fragility, however, comedy is also very remunerative. Nothing succeeds like a successful comedy: people will pay a lot of money to laugh. While the casualty rate in the comedy stakes is high, the survivor is very amply rewarded. Recently on New York stages there has been a succession of comedies competing for valuable prizes.

Ned Season has carried off more of these prizes than any other American playwright in the last twenty years. Barely prolific, he has penned since 1980 a series of comedies that have been hugely popular and successful. Mr Season is indeed an American phenomenon and his reign on American theater has been considerable. A "Ned Season Comedy" has become part of the theatrical language.

It is interesting to report then a Season failure. His latest comedy *Fools* had the briefest run of any Season venture on Broadway. *Fools* is different from the usual Season offering in that it is based on folk fable and set in the Ukraine of "Long Ago." A schoolteacher (John Rubinstein) comes to the village of Kupchikov to discover that a curse of stupidity has been placed on its inhabitants. The breaking of

the curse is the play's slender plot line.

What it does allow is for Mr Season to exercise himself of every short-joke that has ever haunted him. There must be a good hundred of them in the evening and some of them are even funny within the context. A typical sample: a housewife accused of not having doctored some books indignantly replies that she put them on there only yesterday. This, then, is basically a one-joke show and the play's plot does not have enough substance to disconcert us from the obvious fact. The cast includes two genuine American clowns, Mary Louise Wilson and Harold Gould and the director is Mike Nichols, but none of these talents can flesh out such thin material.

With its bizarre移居地 setting (John Lee Beatty and its storybook costumes (Patricia Zappalà) *Fools* can out to be a smash - a kind of *Foolish Fiddler On The Roof*. Some pleasant music and some spruced dancing might have given it that extra dimension it so badly needs.

With his early television background it is

Woody Allen is another American phenomenon in the world of comedy. Also beginning as a TV writer, he became a stand-up comic, then wrote the successful Broadway comedies while also developing into a movie writer/director of international repute with *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan*. In between times he's written three books and contributed hundreds of essays to the New Yorker. Like Ned Season, Woody Allen is a veritable encyclopedic entertainment industry. Thank heavens for the American Work Ethic.

His last theatrical effort was *Play It Again Sam* in 1989 so that the announcement of a new Woody Allen comedy as part of the respected Vivian Beaumont Theatre's new season helped sell many subscriptions. The new play *The Flowering Light Bulb* might not be quite what the subscribers expected. It is a small, intimate, lonely drama and not a multi-murder in tone - with its intimacy being walked up in the large playing area of the Vivian Beaumont.

Clearly auto-biographical in origin, it



A view from Ned Season's new play *Fools*

probably very natural that Ned Season is a writer of contemporary situation comedy with a positive grain for the one-liner to help the situation along. Americans show a preference for naturalistic comedy with contemporary, recognizable situations, settings, and characters. (When did you last see an American family? Never presents his audience with non-discrediting variety) whereas they see themselves in *Fools* the comedy of the Ukraine of long ago, come on, today's Grand Coconuts in the Bronx. Is Mr Season's claim, if an anachronism can get a laugh, then that's a laugh he doesn't have. The rest of the dramatic elements can go fand for themselves.

details the Pollock family in Brooklyn, 1945. End, the ragging but strength-of-the-family mother, Max, the warped gambling father, ready to fly the coop. Paul the bright, stuttering teenage son who returns from life practicing his magic tricks in his room, Season, the wisecracking, confident lad. Finally Act I is a series of broad exposition scenes setting up the family relationships and it is not until Act II that the play catches any fire. This comes with the entrance of a small-time theatrical agent. End he talked into coming and looking at Paul's magic act.

The presentation is a farce and Paul returns to his room having fired and the agent to play a wonderfully sad and comic



Bertie Arthur and Jack Weston as seen from *Broadway Bound*. Photo: Charing Cross Theatre

lose scene. Bertie Woody Allen has his stroke greatly helped by two of the best of Broadway's clowns, Bertie Arthur as the mother and Jack Weston as the agent. Each succeeds in being simultaneously funny and touching - a demonstration of American comic acting at its best.

The play is very much in the American mainstream, with ghosts of Williams (particularly *One Man, Two Guvnors* and *Miller*) ready to pop out of the kitchen cabinets. For Woody Allen, the playwright, *The Floating Light* both indicates a more serious turn and the promise of possible

substantial dramatic income. Let's hope Mr Allen will ignore the distinction of his own multi-talents and find a comfortable way in theatre and stay awhile.

Off-Broadway it is interesting to discover a group, the Manhattan Punch Line, which is devoted to the exclusive presentation of comedy. Manhattan Punch Line is "dedicated to the spirit of comic, the giddy, the surreal, the clever". The group believes that "comedy is the only rational stance". Their subscription reader has a delightful banner: *Comedy. It's a Germ Job, but Somebody's gotta Do it!*

The group presents new comic plays and series, forgeries and under-published plays. As well there are live stage performances of the group's own production team, the Broadway Local, plus stand-up comedy and review performances. Also there are classics in comedy writing and performing.

In all, a commendable enterprise and it is unfortunate to report that their current production of W. S. Gilbert's *Arabian Nights* does not show them to any advantage. The play is, indeed, a find, a small gem of comic comedy that clearly influenced Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It was revived by the National Theatre in London in 1973 with Michael Blakemore directing. Here the production is heavy-handed at the "punch, wack, wodge, wodge" school of comedy. All much too knowing, with most of the actors not up to the technical demands of such difficult material. It is perhaps easier to judge the group with such foreign writing and they will surely be more secure with home-grown comedy. The inability to transfer comedy triumphs again. Which is where we came in.

And if there were any doubts regarding the dedicated earnestness of American comedy consider the following brief notice on the Manhattan Punch Line self-bound:

"Auditions for the Radical Lesbian Feminist Theatre Group will take place next Wednesday. Any audition piece should be about feminism or lesbians and it must be FUNNY!"

Send in the clowns. That's an order.

September - 31 October 1981 WORLD THEATRE FESTIVAL AT NANCY

This year the festival is devoted to theatre from North America. Nancy, France 15-30 October, 1981

JUNIOR YOUTH FESTIVAL MEETING

As well as the traditional courses on music and musical theatre there will be a workshop on West African dance and a seminar on German-Japanese music. Bayreuth, 7-26 August 1981

ITS CONGRESS

9th world congress of the International Federation for Theatrical Research on the theme of "The art of acting - forms of theatre work". Information from the Organising Committee: IFTI Congress Theaterhochschule "Hans Otto", Leipzig, Schwanenstrasse 1, D-07139 Leipzig, German Democratic Republic 20-27 September 1981

ISRAELI NEW THEATRE

Proposed to be held in the Halls of the Crusader Knights in Acre. Information from the Israel Centre of the IIT, 227 Dizengoff Street, Tel-Aviv, Israel September 1981

REPORT FROM BRAZIL

The Report, called *Objetivo: Praia das Artes* from the Teatro-Obras de São Paulo deals with 20 years of theatrical work under conditions often very difficult. *Wise na Teatro-Obras São Luiz*, 1981, São Paulo, São Paulo SP, cap 01/15 Brazil. "THE PICTURE OF MUSICAL THEATRE IN EUROPE"

A symposium on this topic will be held by the Research Institute for Musical Theatre of the University of Bayreuth and the Bavarian European Academy. Speakers include Paedro Grassi, Sir Claus Moser, Rolf Liebermann, Gottfried Fiedrich. Information from IIT-Centre, Bismarckstrasse 17, 9000 Bayreuth, Federal Republic of Germany. August 2-4, 1981

NEW THEATRE 30TH ANNIVERSARY COMPETITION

The longest running theatre in Australia the Sydney New Theatre is celebrating with the offer of a first prize of \$10000 and a second prize of \$2000 for a new full length stage play. Information and entry forms from New Theatre Play Competition Box No. 142, PO Boxington NSW 2444. Closing date 28 January 1982.

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38TH FESTIVAL OF AVIGNON

This year theatre companies coming from Germany, USSR, Italy, Holland and Great Britain Children's Theatre too and three new venues opened Avignon, France, 7 July - 2 August, 1981

19TH INTERNATIONAL DANCE

FESTIVAL

The Orchestra and Ballet of the Hungarian National Opera, the Ballet of the Hamburg Opera, the Royal Danish Ballet and the 20th Century Ballet (Béjart-Breker) at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, 28

FILM

Alison's Birthday - far from convincing

by Elisabeth Riddell

Alison's Birthday, which has turned up unexpectedly... an issue to me sponsored by the National Film Institute with a first run at the Sydney Opera House, can perhaps best be described as too little and too late. It is too late because the humor never seems to have peaked, and passed, after a run of a few years, and too little because it doesn't really seize the audience. In fact at the session I attended it made them laugh though hardly.

One doesn't want to be too hard on it. Its pretensions are modest. Produced by David Munro and directed by Ian Crighton, it stars pretty Joanne Samuel, first seen in any prominence in *Croesus*, Helen and Louisa Lee Brown, John Bluthal, Betsy Brooks and a chorus of corags of whores dressed in green batik miniskirts and carrying toobies around the back garden of a house which seems to be in Sydney's North Shore. Joanne is spending a reluctant couple of days with her mum and uncle who wish to celebrate her 18th birthday.

Her usual habitat is an east coast town where her boy friend, Pete, played by Brown is an unsuccessor in the local radio station. He drives her to the city but is not welcomed by uncle and aunts, who want Alison for themselves. Uncle is a dithering retired gent who is said to be failing fast, though he looks healthy enough, and aunts others Alison's amateur druggists of herbal excess. Alison has nightmares, and no wonder. Things go bump in the night, including a lady in 103 in a wheelchair.

There should be humor, but there isn't and the viewer has far too much time to notice gaps in the continuity and such anomalies as the large suitcase Alison brings for what is only a two-day visit.

Especially as she never wears anything but shorts and a T-shirt.

The writing is far from convincing, in other words. It is pretty difficult to believe a back garden so tidy and sangled that a replica of Shanghaied can be hidden from the neighbours, and that said neighbours would not be put out by the double roles of a singularly noisy type being held in the shrubbery. Led by Vincent Ball as Jeremy Lyle, in the circumstances a good performance.

The four principals are trapped in this

outsize, and none of them is strong enough to break out of the silkscript. Lou Brown seems to have learned nothing except a collection of maxims from what he was in *The Aristocrats*, and Joanne Samuel needs to work on her voice tone and her diction, to help define a pleasant personality.

This is not the kind of film that means much to the local industry. It has not an especially Australian flavor, and the Americans frightened us much more effectively, even at their village.



Joanne Samuel (Brown) in *Alison's Birthday*

Maybe This Time — credible

So many of the parts of *Maybe This Time* are imaginatively conceived and excellently performed that I wish the film came together rather better than it does. It is a great pity for the screenwriters, Bob Ellis and Anna Brookbank, that they have actually written about credible people yet the behaviour and the speech rhythms, right and not taken, the whole thing too seriously. The plot drifts along in a quite forgettable way. That may be part of the trouble — it does drift.

The time is the present, or near enough (allowing the film George Whitlam's government comes unstacked) and the place mostly Sydney. The principals are Fionn, a woman about to be 30 years old and rather shaggy, a recent divorcee, and Stephen, a married man past his first freshness who is press officer to a Cabinet Minister, Paddy the teacher who teaches history at a university and enjoys the attention of female students, and Alan who lives on the land, votes for the Country Party and wants to marry her. A possible lover, Stephen's Cabinet Minister, lurks in the background, a middle-aged, pretty-hand-

some romantic.

This classic type is cleverly suggested by Leonard Teale. The other players are respectively Judy Morris (in danger of being cast once too often as a woman who doesn't know where she's at), Bill Hunter, Mike Preston and Ben Sturton. Also along is Jill Perryman as Fionn's smalltown mother, won-club in pleated nylon and prequel band allowed to sing only once "Just A Song At Twilight", with others around the piano at a birthday party), and cosy Michaela Pavone as Fionn's sister Marge. Marge predictably asserts that she will leave her bottom-pushing husband Jack (Rod McPhail) but in the final scenes she is still with him, clinging to his arm as Fionn fades out through the departure gate at Manly, on her way to Greece and what? Ellis and Brookbank don't say.

As might be expected from the writers, *Maybe This Time* is full of true and funny, and mirthful moments. One of the best occurs when Fionn, driving back to Sydney and from her re-encounter with Alan (who took the dog test), while Paddy says, "It doesn't matter, it happens to everybody" in a somewhat smootheswing hand-met-a-salami played by Chas Heywood in the motel grill. He chuckles with glee, then makes a heavy pass from which she is rescued by the motel clerk. "Why couldn't we have just gone on talking?" she enquires briskly of Heywood. It's a question for which there is no satisfactory answer.

Fionn's real trouble is that she cannot get her man to commit themselves to her. Stephen trembles for this bed in about as perfectivity a way as the number in which he removes his socks. Paddy continues his papers while she peers alongside him in bed. Alan is clearly in too much of a mess. The Minister would have a heart attack if she responded as he singly approaches. There is no passion in her life, passion not being the same as ardor, between the sheets. She and they pick up and then discard one another and it's all very probable but hard to care about. The audience should have to worry a bit more about Fionn, Bill Hunter's time-serving Stephen should be more sharply delineated, there should be more cogency to Paddy's heatmap.

For performance, I would almost give the prize to Ben Sturton, who presents a subtle picture of a once-country-chap no mean feat. Both Hunter and Preston are no-eas, the latter quite ludicrously.

Maybe This Time (Feature Storyboard Film, presented by the NSW Film Corporation, produced by Brian Keenanagh and directed by Chris McGill

DANCE

AB's Programme 3 — Poems, Faun and Monotones

by William Shoobridge

When I first saw Robert Ray's *Poems*, this year's Australian Choreographer set-up from the Australian Ballet, I was so battered by all the borrowings and carry-offs in it that I could hardly walk a straight line home.

Using Jim Parker's catalogue back-ground music to some poems of Sir John Betjeman pompously arranged by David Rawnsford, Robert Ray has managed to concoct a cardboard replica of a ballet. It's not so much like "Englishness" of the week, a charge that cannot be critically substantiated in any case, as the "oldness" of it; you'd think that the last 30 years of choreographic development had never happened.

At first glance it looks like Ashton's *Empress of India*, a tweedy, Nancy Mitford sort of home country presentation, then crudely slathered in movement. Unlike *Empress of India*, however, it doesn't have any love for characters and hardly gives them enough eloquent gesture to keep a warm after-image in the mind's eye.

In the scene titled "Olympic Girls" we open with a triple ball (lapping onto the stage, a la Nijinsky's *Swan*, the Lillian solo, with its dancer slumped in Chaise), and a series of more than omniscient of the Blue Girl in Nijinsky's classic *Les Sylphides*. The trouble is that Ray never gets any further than a facile and glibly clichéd allusion and his choreography, taken on its face value is bland, insipid and merely illustrative of the poems of Betjeman.

The dancers at every performance I witnessed tried hard to make a work but they only succeeded in trying to sell it, and sell it with a hardline indeed. Take the trio of girls in the "Business Women" scene, the poem goes on about young bodies taking in a warm bath on a wacky morning in Camden Town and, sure enough we get three girls in pink body tights, wrap around towels and shower caps doing simple amboises forward and back and not much else. In the "Olympic" poem, Betjeman rolls on about a young girl in a chiffon bikini and what do we see but a girl supported by two boys doing literal "pelingpoloan" movements.

Other choreographers have tried doing ballet to poetry and have usually emerged

blasted by the experience. The choreographic element is always downgraded in things like this, even though it might have great merit on its own. An audience's eye only wants to see what it can't hearing — if not, the friction caused between word and gesture is so great as to negate any impression caused by one or the other. The problems are only worsened if the choreographic element is weak as it is here.

I don't know whether the Company will keep *Poems* in the repertoire very long — personally I'd scratch it and give Ray a second chance at something a little more progressive. What it did do, however, was give different a girl certain roles throughout, no run and for that much it was worthwhile, giving us a chance to look at the young talents arising out of the corps de ballet and colour ranks.

It was interesting to see dancers like Lisa Pasche, Lyndall Sweeny, Joanne Canning and Marlene Fleming dancing out on their own, putting their own stamp on what they do. It's just a shame that they weren't given much to do.

No one from within the company was given a chance to do Jerome Robbins'

Afternoon of a Faun this time around, that was the sole preserve of the regular "star" performers that year, Leonid and Valentina Kozlov. At first glance, it's an odd choice of ballet for them to do, because trained dancers are not noted for emotional subtlety and this, just as much as the ability to dance is important in *Faun*. It is a self-contained lyrical of unspoken poetry held on a single breath.

On opening night, I didn't think they did at all well. It was vibrant, it was emotional but it was also painfully vulgar. Jerome Robbins is shown on record as saying that his little enigmatic masterpiece is about innocence and the first burgeoning of the erotic impulse. The Kozlovs, in their initial performance, looked as if they'd been "let at" for years.

By setting the work in a ballet studio-and-hall afternoon, Robbins manages to mix up a myriad of influences in the work: is the encounter real or a dream, are we seeing the dancer or the reflection of them in the studio mirror, are they dancing with each other or their reflections, and lastly, is it a real encounter or a rehearsal? All of these things have to be sustained around the



Jerome and Leonid Kozlov in *Afternoon of a Faun*. Photo: Bruce Oldham

dancers like a caged bird of paradise.

On opening night, the Koo loves were too staid and cool; it became 'just a rehearsal'. The single architectural factor that keeps the arch of movement up is the tension of discovery in the two protagonists. It is a study in intransitiveness, not movement. As their performances went on, the Koo loves got into the feel of the work, one knew that they liked this ballet because it not only meant a lot to them, but it was some of unfamiliar choreography and was developing them.

'They never managed to contain all the aspects of the work in one performance one night it was an awakening, another night it was a daphnean dream, and then again, due to the powerful animal quality of Leonard, it was an extreme in studied elegance, all of which is valid and all of which was wonderful to watch. I hope that one day they'll be able to get all the aspects of the work together, then it will be fascinating.'

The AB company as we know it, came back into focus with the production revival of Frederick Ashton's *Monsieur*, a masterpiece of pure movement, one part with the same choreographer's *Symphony*. *Monsieur*

As much as anything else, *Monsieur* being costumed in plain bodyights and played out on a darkened bare stage, is a rigorous test of technique and control, one slip or wobble and it is immediately noticeable.

The opening night cast of *Monsieur* set to Erik Satie's *Giouvetsi* — was so nervous that they wobbled more than danced. They also looked heavy and lumpish which is probably due to not being sufficiently schooled in the style. *Monsieur* requires a consistency of devotion to the details of classical style. Good old British Cecchetti technique — all pliés and flowing arabesques, leaped counterpoints, harmonies, ungraceful balances and very strict epaulement.

As far as *Monsieur* was concerned, all three casts I saw were out of flavor with an acrobatic *Spartacus*. Spun and spun all over the place. The dancers made a brave attempt, they all did a lovely series of back-curved lunges into tight arabesque, but none of them could clear their heads in a tragic position or hold an unswayed port de bras. These were bland, wan and tired performances, and all three casts surely needed coaching.

The trio in *Monsieur II* were better, they took on the color transparency and sustained momentum that Ashton ended the work to have, the cast of Marie Rambert, Jeanne Cattell and John Vye especially conveyed the delicate oriental 'subtissime' arm calligraphy without drawing undue attention to it.

The cast iteration, which none of the

cast changes managed to dispel, was the feeling of unnaturalness. When the work is danced by the Royal Ballet you feel the strength and majesty of the whole company behind it. When the AB danced it it was a persistent undertaking. The Company hasn't trained its audience or its dancers to sensibly include a sense of authority and attack in the classical silhouette. These days in the AB, a dancer has practically to fall flat on his face for the audience to notice anything is wrong, the attention and fervor is there, it's just underdeveloped and inchoate.

It's the reason they love such showy and unconvincing Irish like Choo San Goh's *Paravent*. Consideration above works of



Abigail McCallum and Daniel Breen in the AB's *Peter Pan*. Photo: Bruce Gurney

greater import. The Singapore choreographer, now based in America, although using classical techniques as a base has wrenches it into a style of choreography reminiscent of the acrobatic wrestling style of John Butler and Oleg Teter. He even adopts their favorite costume of all over tights for the pal upon whom traditional briefs for the men.

I don't know what he's like in other works, perhaps his champion takes tugs on the attributes of someone else but in his work cast on the AB he uses a clichéd, lumpy choreographic vocabulary, more suited to a Las Vegas floor show than the ballet stage. The work progresses by stageworthy, prettily collapse, getting tighter and tighter. He doesn't know how to get his dancers out of an impasse, so he just breaks the fallibilities they get themselves into and starts the dietary formalism over again. It's an effect somewhat like opening a window on a stuffy room. He doesn't expand the characters and it doesn't allow the audience anything other than a few set pieces and tricks.

If San Goh is, as people say he is, the current "Wunderkind" of American dance, then that country's dance scene is in a bad way.

Perth's Peter Pan — fun and magic

by Terry Owen

Peter Pan, the boy hero of J. M. Barrie's classic story for children, has seen a lot of action in his time.

He has starred in London's West End plays and pantomimes, in a Walt Disney animated film, and now — for the first time in his fictional life — he's the star of a new three-act balletvention, choreographed and produced for the West Australian Ballet Company by its artistic director Gauth Welch.

I talked to Mr Welch about the production before opening night at His Majesty's Theatre on May 27, a benefit performance in aid of the Society for Crippled Children of Western Australia.

"The idea of doing the Barrie classic first occurred to me back in 1979, when we had such a good response to *Ali*, as theatre entertainment for the whole family," he says. "Fantasy is something I think we take pleasure in throughout our lives, but I know that a lot of Australians feel uncomfortable with the romantic fantasy of a ballet like, for example, Swan Lake, where the princess falls in love with a swan man. So when I heard that *Peter Pan* was being revived as a play with a small cast, I thought, why not a ballet aimed at entertaining the family as a whole?"

"I see *Peter Pan* as a very positive move in the business of appealing to the whole family as the basic audience and for dance in Western Australia. The fact is, that Australian audiences now expect dance companies, large and small, to include three acts in the repertoire. The Australian Ballet, for example, is increasingly relying on lavish full length spectacles to hold audiences.

"It has worked its way through to ballet classics like Swan Lake and The Sleeping Beauty, and is now encroaching on literary classics like Alice's Adventures in Wonderland in efforts to keep an audience satisfied."

Working to a budget the Australian Ballet production team would scoff at, Mr Welch has created with his *Peter Pan* a charming family entertainment which blends good-looking and strong classical dancing, pretty candy-coloured designs, touches of clever backstage fun, and the magic of a great theatre like His Majesty's.

The fantasy of flying is the key to the story's attraction, and the spacious cube of His Majesty's proscenium stage is a great place for flying. I knew I wasn't the only faded romantic on opening night to feel tears of wonder as Peter and Wendy flew out high into the moonlight on their way to Never Never Land and battles with



Captain Hook and the pirates in Peter Pan. Photo: Sath McConnell

Captain Hook

Mr Welch is working this year with a more widely experienced group of performers than he has had previously. Timothy Stryer, former first soloist with London Festival Ballet, has a strong clean technique and a range of theatrical skills that allow him to exploit fully his double role of the meek Mr Darling and the fleshy

nasty Captain Hook. Ex Australian Ballet soloist Jack Callick, who is guesting with the company, bubbles along cleanly as Wendy's young brother John, building his characterisation all the time. The pas de quatre for the Darling family, presented with style by Stryer, Callick, Natasha Middleton as Wendy and Maggie Lorrimer as Mrs Darling, provides the first a-

lents after a few key starts, and it's one of several passages throughout the work which let the audience relax and enjoy some good, traditional set piece dancing.

Geoffrey Baynham's Peter has lots of muscular bounces but needs more personality definition, and Joanne Mandylary Tinker Bell is a nicely-judged combination of twinkly-wing lightness and spott beauty ratio.

The commissioned score, by Vernon Williams, is thoroughly danceable. Mr Williams has had a long and successful association with dance as conductor and composer, and it's apt to see him in such a good situation in action.

Steve Neale's art nouveau inspired set works smoothly through the Never Never Land scene changes, and I especially like his fancy dress costumes for Captain Hook and his under-achieving pirates.

Like most story books, Peter Pan has its fair share of unexplained entrances and exits. A more serious criticism is that, as family entertainments, at about 90 minutes too long. Judicious pruning in the second act, notably the Red Indians sequence, would repeat the action along more successfully without spoiling any of the fun and magic. Because it is theatre magic that Mr Welch has aimed at, and largely succeeded in creating, with this Peter Pan, giving us the chance to believe in fantasy and dreams.



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OPERA

Hoffmann, Katya and Carmelites

by Ken Healey

May brought me three operas within 24 hours, with much to compare: two of them were French, two sung in English, two presented by the Australian Opera. The mathematically inclined will have no difficulty in understanding that all three pairs were different. Operatic permutations... or should that be combinations?

The two French composers, Paisiello and Offenbach, could hardly be more dissimilar, the former's *Ilir Osligari* of the *Carmelites* being through-composed and essentially intense. The *Tales of Hoffmann* on the other hand contains a good deal of speech (far too much to justify the ACO's decision to offer it in French), and a score whose superficiality prevents the opera from being great.

Hoffmann has always seemed to me an ideal subject for an operatic masterpiece. All the romantic elements are there: an ardent lover in search of the perfect woman, an evil genius who continually foils him, comic relief, magic. The saga unfolds in a series of mini-murders as Hoffmann calls for his current lady to finish singing in a performance of *Don Giovanni*, that tale of opera's greatest but finally least successful lover. Offenbach lavished melody upon it, but Barber's masterly *Messia* demanded a composer with psychological insight and the technical means to express it. The creator of *La Fura dels Baus* proved better suited to among the carnage.

Right for who might have been by no means implies that Offenbach's opera is unworthy of our national company. Originally created for Joan Sutherland and the Sydney Opera House, Jose Carreras's men and costumes looked better at the St Kilda Palace than they had done when I last saw them in Canberra. Richard Bonynge's reconstruction of the work's musical and dramatic geography is perhaps his finest contribution to modern repertoire. And the composite role of the four villains is undoubtedly the best thing we have had from Raymond Myrsin.

While there is no doubt that dramatically the four villains are the incarnations of a single evil genius, the use of the same soprano for Olympia, Gubetta, Antonia, and Stella poses a question. If they are all in an obvious sense the same woman, then



Annmarie Myers (Dr. Olympia) and Joann Conklin (Antonia) in the ACO's *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Photo: Bruce Renshaw

Hoffmann has already found the perfect woman in so far as she exists. The experience of losing her in her every

manifestation becomes a tragedy too deep for Offenbach's pretty tunes to encompass. But we know that one soprano, Adele



Robert Lloyd (Doktor) and Marilyn Richardson (Katya) in the ADO's *Katya Kabanova*. Photo: John Durnell

Isaac, sang the three roles (Grafetta was cut) in the previous one hundred performances.

Whatever of the opera's history, Jean Caron has now added a revision (Grafetta to her justly acclaimed tubercular heroine, Antonia). The doll, Olympia, has always seemed a natural surrogate for Caron's clean and agile coloratura, one stands in awe of the alert and power of her voice at *Golliwog*, while cherishing the ethereal quality of gharmonisation as Antonia. Anselm Austen was a liveliably Hoffmann, although the role is not yet settled into his voice as his Rudolfin. At the performance I saw, Rosemary Gane made the most of her sole appearance as the Muse, and Nicholas Stuart Chilvers seemed more comfortable conducting this score than in anything I had previously heard from him.

If Offenbach merely skims the surface (which, when you look at a musical score, is where the fun is), the same cannot be said of Leoš Janáček, whose intense psychological drama *Katya Kabanova* occupied the Princess Theatre. Peacock's a useful starting point for those who want to find their musical way to *Katya*, or for that matter to *Joseph*, the Czech composer's earlier work in the ADO's repertoire. While his scores contain more wherewithal than Peacock's *Carmen* (this month's third opera), Janáček does not sustain melodic lines with the cohesive power of unbroken melody as Peacock does. Indeed, conflict of character is expressed largely through rapid sequences of recitatives which can give the appearance of fragments. With often dissonant chording and rough-textured orchestration, the starkness of the score is enhanced by omission of linking modulatory chords (la Messe Chiarini's phrase) and rhythms frequently based on eighth-note patterns.

Katya is a powerfully moral being, her adultery and her tragic guilt locking her

into conflict with the oppressive forces of her Russian provincial town. They are personified in her mother-in-law, Kabanova, who drives Katya to suicide as easily as guilt does. Peacock has an no greater conflict of extrinsic interpretation, yet Janáček is the more profound dramatic writer. This is the composer for the thinking theatregoer who would find a way to opera.

As Katya Marilyn Richardson was touchingly vulnerable without a hint of weakness. Jennifer Birmingham made a touching Varvara, her companion. And they both sang cogently. All three roles, Gregory Dempsey as Katya's lover, Robert Gard as her mother-dominated husband, and Ross Somers as the modest lover of Varvara, sang and acted with a degree of intelligence not normally associated with tenors. But then, this is not a "feel good" opera. The harmonic power of Rossini's *Kabanova* was so elemenarily dramatic that singing, instead of being a stylised or confined form of expression, seemed the only way to convey visually such non-dramatic emotions.

Although the *Volga* unaccountably begins the opera in the vicinity of the

where, and a challenge to an audience to respond more imaginatively than by applauding laudable re-creations of printed naturalism.

In Canberra, the night before I went to Melbourne, designer James Ridewood proved himself a master of supporting strong drama with slender financial means. Product Robin Lovejoy's edited committed performances from a cast which varied from barely adequate to strong if not accomplished. The *Dialogue of the Carmelites* lacks the passionate, open conflict which characterises *Katya Kabanova*, yet for that elusive audience member, the pleasure reaching out towards opera, it is at least as much a revelation as *Katya*.

The title of Peacock's opera is important. The action unfolds as a series of dialogues, first between individuals, later between the Carmelite convent and the revolution. It is a brave composer who would render it into music drama, and Peacock was not helped by a combination of inexperience and lack of competence from Canberra Opera's men who shared the burden of the opening scene. Therefore the performances (principally from the



Jean Richards, Andrew Fresh, Heather Saadon and Ross Somers in Canberra Opera's *The Dialogues of the Carmelites*. Photo: Ruth Saur

orchestra pit (where no beauty is admitted) and ends upright (when Katya throws herself in). Roger Balch's set is an object lesson to all opera and ballet companies with large budgets. Wooden decking indicated outdoor paths, and a dock when necessary. An offstage of timber flooring did not place for the basis of a room, and interests were established with free-standing furniture. Projectors on a cloth, the occasional flowerpot, and a chandelier, flying metal pipes constructed in bu-bu-like sections, comprised the compelling stage setting. Not a superfluous dollar any-

woman) grew until in the final scene they marched in under the huge silhouette of Madame La Gaffolane as she arrived, powerfully at the vocal cords, each carrying right of the "Salut Regine".

It seemed that Robin Lovejoy had directed Heather Saadon to portray Blanche as a snarled, compact with exaggerated physical postures of grief and death. In fact, if one were to fault the massive achievement of Lovejoy and his cast, it would be that both Blanche and the old Priam (Glynn Elser) were too active physically in their efforts to portray deep

emerson. It was not difficult to forgive the Princess her excessive robustness on her deathbed, she sang so well. So did Isabel Veale as the disappoointed love-apparet, and Jean Richards as the new Princess Fiona. Macneagle made an impressive debut as both singer and actor as the youthful, ingenuous Sir Constantine, and Heather Seddon confirmed the quality displayed at Salfi in *The Gipsy Baron*.

Conductor Donald Heller, like his colleague Lovsey, elicited from forces of widely varying ability orchestral playing that largely made up in commitment and sensitive accompanying what it lacked in detailed accuracy. Canberra must envy Melbourne its Elizabethan orchestra, which had played as well for David Keam in *Korng* as it had for Brian Chalkendar at the matinee of *Hoffmann*.

Both of the operas which were sung in English (Carmen and Korng) were 99% audible to me. There were very few acceptable French accents in *Hoffmann*, and anyway the effort of listening hard becomes tiring even when one has some degree of the language and a close knowledge of the opera. But opera in English is another topic.

Tales of Hoffmann in Perth

by Charles Southwood

Last month's season of *Tales of Hoffmann* from the WA Opera is another box-office success for a company whose relations with the public are quite extraordinarily close and cordial. In part this is the result of shrewd management and an increasing bias towards tried and proven repertoire. It's also a function of the company's effort to make its productions look good, and *Tales* was no disappointment for an expectant first-night audience which oohed and aahed appreciatively at William Dowd's often sumptuous costumes and expertly-painted chandeliered sets.

This may seem a strange point to introduce first up, but my hunch is that the outward appearance of a production is one of the principal ways in which a company can acknowledge the role of status symbol thrust upon it by many a city and nation. Having an opera company to patronise is rather like having a Mercedes in the garage, and the WA company, particularly since taking residence in the splendidly refurbished His Majesty's Theatre, has moved on the fact to win over more devotees of its particular brand of high-class entertainment. If so much is clear, however, *Tales* may have left many of its patrons less clear as to the deeper point of

the experience. As one audience member commented before lapsing into delirious "Woo's a lovely" and all that singing.

Tales received a largely local performance under the firm musical direction of Gerald Krug. Ian Westrip as Leidler and various was joined by two sopranos, Cherie Leishman as Hoffmann's four loves and John Marin as Hoffmann himself. Anne

appropriate support, particularly from Anne Watson's pantomime-ish, know-all Nekla, Hoffmann not an sympathetic merely foolish figure instead of reflecting the formality, and also the generosity, of an infatuation fuelled in him by malevolent powers.

Act II lost power simply through lack of space in the set. Strong groupings and



Ian Westrip (Doppietta), Cherie Leishman (Leidler), John Marin (Hoffmann) and Anne Watson (Nekla) in WA Opera Tales of Hoffmann.

Watson played Nekla and Antonia's mother on opening night. Megan Sutton alternated with her thereafter. Production was by Edgar McCallie.

Act III worked extremely well, as the tawny grey of Hoffmann's highest world closed in on the home, the furniture, the costumes, even the marionette instruments of Antonia and her father. The warm dramatic qualities of Leishman's and Marin's voices found their true place here and Ian Westrip, gesticulated succinct and explosively bewigged in grey, had no trouble convincing us that Dr Miracle was no human doctor, and certainly no heavenly one. Cherie Waddell was good as the touchingly human but powerless father.

Other moments achieved more qualified success. I admired the way the themes of illusion and manipulation were foreshadowed by the two hands like those of some great, supernatural puppeteer, holding up the backdrop at the start of Act I. And what an witty legging those two closed ranks of jerking, supine dolls gave us at the sum of actus 2, flanking and only once once more animating a cavernous ballroom utterly void of human soul? Cherie Leishman was impressive as Olympia, its still that Hoffmann falls so madly in love with, but overall Edgar McCallie somehow failed to get his actors the necessary direction to bring out the power of the situation. For lack of

movement were difficult to manage, particularly with the chorus on stage, and as a result we were given few of the visual clues needed to clarify a fairly complex set of relationships. Ian Westrip made too little impact as the magnifico Doppietta, perhaps because his relatively small stature reduced his visual lighting power against the marble patterns and other detail in the set and the splendid costumes largely lost in the crumpled mass of the chorus. But what a wonderful ending to the act, with Dapertutto, the dwarf and Gschlern gliding easily across the darkened gallery at the back of the set while downstairs Hoffmann, horrified and starting, is dragged off the other way by Nekla. This was one time when the relationships of the act became completely, chillingly clear.

Sets and costumes alone don't give a production the poaches of moments like these. A producer has to help his singers extend the dramatic intentions of the piece, already present in the music, into the area of supportive action. Maybe first-night nerves crept off the layer of the production. Maybe Edgar McCallie under-estimated his cast's ability to sing and act at the same time. Whatever the cause, the result was a performance that made less sense than it could or should have. The company has some hard thinking to do in this area before mounting the rest of its long run of otherwise high-standard productions.

THEATRE/ACT

Fidelity of approach

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

by Janet Hayley

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller. Lyndhurst Theatre, 1617 Church St., Melbourne. Tel. 717 0700. M-F 8.30.

Director: Pamela Rosenberg. Designer: Linda Chalcraft. Lighting: Alan Major. Set: Michael P. Hayes.

Cast: Ruth (Lorraine) Goodman: Christopher; Linda (Margery) Friedman: Happy (Dorothy) Elkins; Bernard (John) Smith: Willy (Ben); Mary (Virginia) Morris: Phil (Matthew) Mackenzie; Uncle Ben (Bill) Revel; with John Honey, Elizabeth Long, June Moore, Cheryll Wilson, Eddie Wren. (P.M. 1981)

Arthur Miller's Pulitzer Prize-winning play is often characterized as the prototypical vision of the futility of the American dream. Yet Miller himself saw it in more universal terms: his son, he said, was "to see forth what happens when a man

comes upon an historical phenomenon, no matter how significant in human terms, is to take a reductionist approach to the work. Willy Loman is far more than a victim of transnational commercial industry. He is the dimension man, a man whose life might have derived meaning from working on the land or with his hands, but whose progress has forced him to become the parasite of the remains of others' labour. His failure to make his life work on the material level is both an image and an ironic reinforcement of his deeper failure to attach any ultimate significance to the pre-occupations that have had up most of his life.

All Willy's superficial values are progressively stripped away. Elusive success presents itself to him in many guises: in the ghost of his dead brother Ben, who created the tangible wealth of diamonds from the African jungle; in the physical prowess of his son Biff, whom he mistakenly sees as a healthier, luckier projection of himself; in the figure of his friend Charley upon whose charity he is forced to depend and whose son Bernard

defends. Willy's inner life: "A salesman is got to dream. It comes with the territory." It is through his dreams that Willy achieves humanity, a poignancy and tragic humanity, perhaps, but demanding a measure of respect.

I went along to Repertory with some trepidation, for it is a long time since the company tackled anything so complex and serious. In the event I was surprised by the quality of the production. Gordon Glomberg as Willy gave us the right mixture of pathos and dignity, moving between the struggle to ignore the realities of his plight and the increasingly anxious awareness of them. The shift in gear in his transition from near deservance to a completely sane judgement that all the options except one are closed to him was beautifully managed. Some memory lapses mercifully did not interrupt the dramatic flow, and Glomberg's rather limited vocal range fortunately did not matter in the intimacy of Theatre Three.

The other leading actors were not so successful. Margery Ehnhaus as Linda, devoted wife and mother, was either too forceful and aristocratic, though it should be noted that part of her difficulty lay in trying to make Linda acceptable to an audience whose conception of women does not include this combination of self-denial and personal strength. Phil Roberts and David Bennett were notably crass as Biff and Happy, but there was a dangerous tendency to caricature in both performances, which damped the subtlety of the play.

There were good performances in some of the supporting roles, notably from Phil Mackenzie as Charley. Charley can easily become a bland lay figure, but Mackenzie filled out the character with a soft blend of amazement and compassion. And John Honey brought a brutal conviction to the role of Howard Wagner.

Both design and production were faithful to Miller's minor instructions and were enhanced by imaginative lighting. I particularly liked the use of a strong side floodlight on Ben to suggest the way Ben's figure casts an shadow over Willy's life. Russell Brown's set took advantage of the disproportionately wide stage to show the cramped Loman house dwarfed and threatened through skeletal walls by the surrounding apartment buildings. Pamela Rosenberg's production was not at all adventurous and lacked intensity at some points, especially in the all-important relationship between Willy and Biff; on the other hand, the fidelity of her approach allowed the classic lines of the play to emerge without distraction or distortion.



Gordon Glomberg and Matt Murphy in *Cambridge Rep's* *Death of a Salesman*.

does not have a grip on the forces of life". Undoubtedly there is a sense in which *Death of a Salesman* is a social document. It is firmly embedded in American middle-class mores, its style and diction are decidedly American, and is framed in a quintessentially American metaphor of submergence, that of "Salesmanship".

But although social-documentation is an important function of art, it is also contingent upon the roundness of good art, and to see this play as primarily a

sarcasm where the hero has failed, Space and light and the possibility of spiritual expansion are gradually crowded out of a life dogged by mechanical events which wear out as soon as they are paid for. His final indignity is his suicide, which will give his family \$20,000 in insurance.

But Willy Loman is allowed the dignity of an epilogue which affirms some basic human values in his life. When Biff says over his grave that his father "never knew who he was", Charley rebukes him by

THEATRE / NSW

Commercial theatre at its best

THE DRESSER

EVITA

YOU NEVER CAN TELL

by Michael Le Moigne

The Dresser by Ronald Harwood. Presented by Brian Misanoff, Wilson Murray. The MLC Theatre Royal Company and The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in association with Michael Cacoyannis Theatre Royal Sydney. 1989. Opened May 21, 1991. Director: Michael Fenton. Design: Liane Bennett. Costumes: Michael Cacoyannis. Lighting: Roger Lupton. Cast: Norman, Warren Mitchell; Mrs Gwendoline Ruth Chacknell; Major-General Hayes, Sir Gordon Chater; Miss Lydia Crayton, Dorothy; Ian French; Mr Quigley, David Cawthron; with Ken Barlow, David Goldsmith, Paul Keast, Robert Coates, Paul Fatty (Professional).

Evita after Juan Gelman by George Bernanos. Directed by Brian Misanoff. Starring: Liza Minnelli, Young Lady; Sophie Little, Performance; Liza Minnelli, Young Gentleman; Alan Wilson, Doctor; Maggie Blanks, Captain; Marlene Fawcett, Lieutenant; Alan Tatch, Lieutenant; Gordon McNaught, Water; Raymond Phillips, Young; Wayne, Mark Ramond, Corp; Liza Minnelli, Young; Peter Kennedy (Professional).

Sydney is currently playing host to two stand-out examples of commercial theatre at its very best: *The Dresser* at the Theatre Royal prior to a national tour, and *Evita*, at Her Majesty's, now with the original Broadway cast, Patti LuPone, should not on any account be missed.

The Dresser is a delight from start to finish. Ronald Harwood's play is centred on the love of the spectre: egomaniacally and compassionate (the other passions, insecurities and elements of a company of actors performing *King Lear* in the Battle of the Blitz, around 1942).

The leader of this motley crew, made up of actors too old, sick or crafty to die for their country, is the redoubtable Sir, played with considerable aplomb by Gordon Chater. Sir is the last (with the possible exception of Hayes Gordon) in the long tradition of stage-managers, men of steady self-confidence who cast themselves in all the best parts, see their companies with the iron fist in the iron glove, and pad most of the bills.

Their names live on — Sir Henry Irving, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Sir Charles Wyndham, Sir Frank Benson, Sir George Bassett, and in Australia, George Durrant, John Alden and others. Ronald Harwood's play is driven in part from his

own experience as dresser to one of the most revered stage-managers, Sir Donald Wolfit.

It is an engrossing revenge. The dresser, Norman, played by Warren Mitchell, has all the best lines and Sir himself is something of a supporting player. There is splendid work from Gordon Chater, Ruth Chacknell and others, but it is, inampliably, Warren Mitchell's play. He shapes and moulds each movement with the expertise and timing of a great actor.

As the play starts, the company is in a state of crisis. Sir appears to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown, quoting the wrong plays, starting to make up for Ophelia and incapable of remembering even his first line. And the other members

Rodney Barker's perceptive direction is always at one with Harwood's text, enhancing it and bringing out above all the warmth behind the humour.

The setting parallels with King Lear itself: it matches the texture, emphasising just that sense of continuity that lies in the core of the drama. Sir's three women, Her Ladyship (Ruth Chacknell), devoted, spinsterish stage manager (Jennifer Hayes) and a younger admirer (Linda Cropper) who loves as much the career speak her love, echo Gordon, Regan and Cordelia, and the Blitz itself is a fair approximation to Lear's "fire and tempests". But the poem is never overstated.

Chater's part is certainly the most



Warren Mitchell (Norman) and Gordon Chater (Sir) in *The Dresser*. Photo: Dennis and Karen

of the company are well aware that Lear without the King is liable to make a hash without an audience and weeks without wages.

Only Norman keeps his head. His loyalty to Sir is unshaking. Like Lear's own Fool, he knows he serves a poor master, but he also knows the value of love and service.

In some ways, Norman represents the spirit of the theatre itself. The actors are by nature egomaniac, "such stuff as dreams are made on", but there is, there has to be, something which connects.

It may be something trivial, like the superstition that any mention of "The Scottish play" will bring bad luck, when Sir forces himself to (in mention the dreaded name, Norman winces in half-gone snark, turning round three times and knocking before coming back. Or it may be something deeper, such as the need for an actor to play his part right through to the end, to the with his bairns on. There are elements of ritual to the play, and it is succinctly moving.

difficult. Obliged as he is to be something of a social lion (Sir, that is) the problem is to maintain credibility. Sir, by virtue of his position, is a hard man, and a hard man to love, perhaps only Norman loves him truly, and even his love is most often mocked.

This is a wonderful piece of theatre, it works on many levels of humour and emotion. It is witty but not particularly cynical, nostalgic but not sentimental, strong but not overpowering. It will live long in the memory.

Patti LuPone's arrival to take the title part in *Evita* for three months seems to have prompted a fresh burst of energy in a company that has, after all, been together for over a year.

Her opening night was a blessed contrast to the St Valentine's Day disaster in Sydney, when Jennifer Murphy's opening night was marred by a serious throat infection.

It seemed at the time to be a one-night musical; the odyssey of "Don't Cry For

"Ms Argentina" resonates through almost every other melody. This is still the case, but with a star in full voice and an full drama composed of the stage, the orchestrations and variations are more than sufficiently beguiling.

Peter Carroll's *Peron* is a superbly conceived and executed характеристика, which mercilessly lays bare the man's strengths and weaknesses. "Dios are ruling the horns are out" he delivers with an unforgettably chilling quaver to the note. John O'Meara's *Chi Giacomo*, the voice of dissent, is now more authoritative, and Laura Mitchell, as Peron's girl-friend, sings "Another Sustance in Another Hall" with enchanting clarity and ardour.

It is worth remembering that as spectacle the show works very much better seen from the Press Circle than from the Stalls.

Evita is both heroic and tragic, an inspiring figure and yet a flawed, ignoble, grasping manipulator. We must love her and hate her. She is larger than life, a symbol of the conflict that between good and evil. For all its suppositiously well-packaged presentation, Evita is much more than a musical.

Far from the big city theatres in Italy Kilton, Trevor Clark's production at Marian Street of George Bernard Shaw's *Has Never曾 Told* is very clean and classical, true to the spirit of the original, but a little slow. Pauses are held, poses adopted and every word is given its full weight. The characterisations, particularly by Patrick Dickson, Kainna Faust and Maggie Bonne, are amazing enough but never fully convince.

The main interest of the play lies in Shaw's astoundingly perceptive view of what twentieth century women would do about resistance to male dominance. The result is an exhilarating evening that takes through compelling ideas. But it is to be hoped that the new management at Marian Street will grasp the article more firmly and offer more challenging, more contemporary theatre in the future.

Tessin, Robbin Raskin, Jay Miller, Odilia Kepp, Dennis Ward, Pamela French, Bob Fink, Peter Cason, David Frantz, Michaela, Greg, Sean, Matthew.

The Sydney Theatre Company has dared — and dared magnificently — in *Chicago*, a "musical vaudeville", which opened at the Opera House on June 6 and will transfer to the Theatre Royal on mid-July. *Chicago* is a musical vaudeville? What's a musical doing on the boards of our major subsidised theatre? For those of us lucky enough to have seen this smash hit, the answer is simple: entertainig audiences. People love the theatre setting, as one another, striking up conversations with total strangers. That's roughly summarised by the whole experience.

Musicals have grown beyond the 1-song-come-on days to a sophisticated genre better known as musical theatre. In the modern musical *Chicago* is history, it doesn't just serve as decoration to the exposition. Mortimer plays his Chicago go even farther than that. In rather the

Cabaret has obviously had a big influence, both in the writing of *Chicago* and in the staging of this Sydney production. The choreography is original and unperformed, and it's stunning. Ross Coleman blends the various talents of actors and dancers into a remarkable company. In paper hats and brief tops they are the angular and aggressive prison inmates. In suits of newspaper, they are a scurrying pack of jokers picking over the corpses of their newly-born victims. Power and power are the products of Mr Coleman's work.

Director Richard Wherrett is to be congratulated for coordinating the total effect and for ensuring the breathtaking pace of the show. "All That Jazz" is an opening number with all the energy and force of a big sing. Could they follow that opening? They could and they did. But so, the singing is quieter, more low key, more thoughtful, reflective and upbeat. But this is welcome, since *Chicago* is highly



Janet Jackson (Evita) in NYC's *Chicago* — same way as the *Chicago*'s Opens subverted eighteenth century society. Chicago shows ours to be a self-seeking and corrupt society.

The setting is Chicago in the 1920s in particularly, 1909, COUNTY JAIL, which is picked out in authorised dressing room lights as a permanent feature of Brian Thompson's set. The orchestra is located on an upper level to the rear of the stage. Two semi-circular arms of bars can be swung into place when necessary. Otherwise the space is unadorned: swivelling, sliding like black onyx. Against this background the costumes of Roger Kirk blend subtly in grey and silver, or contrast in the tessellated colours of the cabaret-courtoisne scene. All this adds up to a most stylish production. Rod Dunbar's MC sets the tone with his mischievously stock introduction and periodic commentary.

demanding of audiences. God only knows how the performers manage.

Nancy Hayes and Geraldine Turner share the spotlight splendidly at turns graciously allowing it to fall on Judi Dench and Terence Donovan. Mai Hayes as Roxie Hunt and kMasai Turner as Velma Kelly play the two misandries of the play whose resolution depends on giving a better showing in the three-ring circus that was Chicago in the Twenties. Mr Donovan is the slick lawyer, Billy Flynn, who boasts his entrance in a Bushy bowler, amidst whirling ornate feathers and chirping chorus girls. Judi Dench is a marvellous Maureen Mama Morton, the broker between the women prisoners and their lawyer.

George Spartalis was the brains of the gallery as Amos (or is it Andy?), the Chaplin (or is it Bert Lahr?) figure, who

Complete success

CHICAGO
by Barry O'Connor

Chicago book by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse. Music by John Kander. Lyrics by Fred Ebb. Sydney Theatre Company, Opera House Drama Theatre, NSW. Opened June 6, 1987. Director: Richard Wherrett. Musical director: Peter Cason. Choreographer: Ross Coleman. Set design: Brian Thompson. Costumes: Roger Kirk. Lighting: Alan Parkinson. Conductor: Colin Ford. Stage Manager: John Burns.

Cast: Rose Hart, Nancy Hayes, Judi Dench, Geraldine Turner, Billy Flynn, Terence Donovan, Mai Hayes, kMasai Turner, Mai Hayes, Judi Dench, Peter Cason, George Spartalis, etc. Rod Dunbar with Judi Dench, Robbin Raskin, Jay Miller, Odilia Kepp, Dennis Ward, Pamela French, Bob Fink, Peter Cason, David Frantz, Michaela, Greg, Sean, Matthew.

takes the rap (indeed for his wife in name only). Round Mt Sprouts masterfully makes the stage, vocally singing 'Mr Cellophane' about a man everybody just looks through without noticing. We are all the stage-bred children, however, when George Sprouts leans forward at a pernicious angle, to shake the hand of a drunk cow parson.

It's not easy reviewing a complete success like *Always*. This reviewer hasn't wholly succeeded, but, believe him when he tells you that the Sydney Theatre Company has — most amazingly so —

Pregnant with laughter

WE CAN'T PAY? WE WON'T PAY!

by Barry O'Connor

We Can't Pay? We Won't Pay by David C. O'Connor
Felicity M. (Opened May 1981)
Director: Dick Balfour; Designer: Arthur Dicks;
Stage Manager: Ian Young; Costumes:
Cate and Lynne; Scenery: Margarette; Stage
Lighting: Lynne; Associate Director: Bryan Wilson; Stage: Alan Best; A
Production of Mt Sprouts

The trademark of Mt Sprouts productions is their set designs which reach out, embracing actors and audience in a cosy rapport. Arthur Dicks' setting for the QTC's latest play, David Felt's political farce *We Can't Pay? We Won't Pay*, carries on this tradition. As you enter the auditorium you pass under a line of scrupulously clean washing line to find most of the same made, trailing from an Italian working-class kitchen in tangerine and canary yellow.

We are in Milan, and the Fiat workers' wives are refusing to pay for their electricity. 'We won't pay' is their defiance of the spiralling cost of living. But it's not strong-duty like the austerities and quite another to face their husbands, who are peasant-proud and pig-headed. So the girls band together to disguise their contrariness from their husbands who are as earn trying to keep their wives from discovering their own guilty acts.

This is no down-beat drama, no agitprop here. David Felt's political satire, whilst it may be seriously intended, is sugar-coated and served up in a palpable farcical form. As farce, however, the play is an unqualified success. Dick Balfour's direction is witty, sharp and clever. Suzanne Royleance and Bryan Wilson, Laura Gabriel and Alan Best, make an enthusiastic and immensely proficient acting ensemble. Kevin Jackson is a one-man cast-of-thousands, whose near air-force in quick changes becomes an joy to be shared with the audience.

The feel is inherently playful and suited to the Australian ear and idiom, without

a bonus damage to the original. There are no fake Italian accents, except inexplicably for the Pope. The acting style is the exaggeration of faces, not of national stereotypes. Audience will never forget the women hiding their shapely pregnant under their veils, or Inspector of Carabinieri thinking his programme by device muscle. The look on Bryan Wilson's face as Alan Best unknowingly runs an olive his wife has given birth to. Pregnancy is catching and the audience is left pregnant with laughter.

All stops out

MEIGHT AS WELL TALK TO
YOURSELF

by Barry O'Connor

Meight As Best Tell To Yourself by Alan Ayckbourn, Theatre Royal, Wollongong NSW (Opened May 1981)
Director: Ian Clark; Designer: William Pritchard; Lighting: Michael Munnell; Stage Manager: Judy Armstrong;
Costume: Faye Montgomery; Scenery: Bryan Wilson; Stage: Alan Best; A Production of Mt Sprouts

Meight As Best Tell To Yourself is really Alan Ayckbourn's *Clouds*, a quartet of self-optimising difficulties performed by Theatre Smith with all stops out.

The play is that recognisably Ayckbourn style, which combines social truth with theatrical farce, digging four aspects of middle class life: 'Mother Figure' is a piece of nursery madness, in which Faye Montgomery's Lucy, whose whole world is sappos, orange juice and tattiness, treats her newly wed neighbours as a pair of mischievous six year olds. 'Between Mouthfuls' is a never hot, somewhat obvious restaurant comedy about cross-table adultery. The two couples concerned, who are at separate tables, Becker, bairn and bitch, only being audible to us when Geoff Merrills' long suffering waiter approaches them. 'Guisford's Fete' is an achingly fussy look at a village fete where nothing goes right, and where the farm fair business keeps on going round and more outrageous. 'A Talk in the Park', the weakest of the four, brings home the charms of the evening, summing up Wollongong's playwright-approved change of title.

David Venter at the keyboard brings the evening together with the familiar strains of Scott Joplin, making the scene changes effortless through songs reminiscent of Porter, Coward, and Gilbert and Sullivan. Bill Pritchard's art of triangular prisms also helped the smooth running of the production.

The cast is excellent and faultlessly directed. Paul West is a welcome addition to the core company of Faye Montgomery,

Gordon Stowik, and Katherine Thomson. They all double in many roles which highlight their transformational skills as actors. Space doesn't permit a complete eulogy but special mention has to be made of that clever comedienne, Katherine Thomson.

Cultural flavours

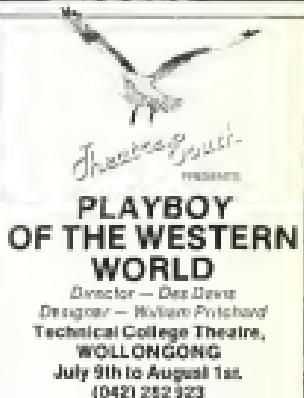
BRIDAL SUITE
MAG AND MAG

by Collette Rayment

Meight As Best Tell To Yourself (above) and *Meight As Best Tell To Yourself* (top), by Alan Ayckbourn, Theatre Royal, Wollongong NSW (Opened May 1981)
Theatrical Team:
Director: Ian Clark; Designer: William Pritchard; Lighting: Michael Munnell; Stage Manager: Judy Armstrong; Costumes: Faye Montgomery; Scenery: Bryan Wilson; Stage: Alan Best; A Production of Mt Sprouts

With Barry Dickins' double-bill, *The Bridal Suite* and *Mag and Mag*, Sydney audiences have the chance to have some strong Australian cultural flavours treatment, of those found in Henry Handel Richardson, or more recently *Mr Boffo*. Dennis Murphy avoids confusing his plays in any one Australian icon. The *Bridal Suite* is set 'along way from anywhere' and *Mag* and *Mag's* domestic, we imagine, anywhere in a line of suburban dwellings. Both plays look considerably in an instant arrangement of bedroom and parlour furniture which invites us to 'imagine the beyond' — 'beyond ad mecum' — as Verdi says, or the endless houses with their nature strips akin to that of *Madame Bovary*.

The *Bridal Suite* works as a lyrical dream-of-conveniences style of narrative



PLAYBOY
OF THE WESTERN
WORLD

Director — Des Davis
Designer — Michael Pritchard
Technical College Theatre,
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from Vera's mind alternating between the brooding lassitude of the real present and the remembered emotions of the past. As the past becomes the present in the fantastic situation of her insanity, Vera relives her courtship with Jack, her wedding day, her bush adventures "up the Hume" with her new husband, and her encounters with the "cops" the "tarts" and the "pubs" of the post-war years.

Dickon can possibly be charged with too rigidly adhering to a set pattern of presenting Vera's consciousness in which the present reality breaks down to remembrance, which in turn collapses into a renewed awareness of the present, and so on. He does, however, attempt to vary Vera's return to reality, sometimes letting her break down and weep herself back to the present sometimes bringing her back through a fit of laughter.



Anna Barnes as Mrs. Brad Pitt. Photo: Bill Jacobell

Anne Barnes holds off through a wide range of emotions — perhaps submerging more brilliantly with the positive joyous feelings than in the more desperate ones. Her tentative opening of the play — an epurophile to death in an inward abstract kind of optimism — may also conspire to give a strong performance. Jenny Lang-peach's nice sense of pace poised the actress through some dangerously sentimental areas such as Vera's twice returning to the bridal veil and once using it as the instigator of her reconnection.

Mug and Bag provides us with the rare experience of seeing women playing (and playing well) scenes of sheer physical comedy. Mug and Bag, however, do more than those whipped cream and perform vigorous and deft acrobatic jokes. They skilfully work through the medium of a metaphor used throughout the play. In Dickon's words, the play is one for "two budgerigars, being two women of one hundred years, having 30 arguments, two caps fits, and a lot of bird-battlings." The old women play about a swing built in their room to prevent boredom, they move in

and out of their metaphoric characters (thus bad qualities exploring their human idiosyncrasies) and in and out of comedy and tragedy.

Jenny Lang-peach has seized the right moment to introduce Bag's use of the swing so that we easily accept the importance of this commentary on the lives of the sisters. She has also succeeded in presenting through the technical skills of Louise Le Neve and Robyn Gurney, the essence of what it is toaged. Perhaps the century-old sisters' mutually abusive sessions over-emphasise an some archaic use of language, but then they also perform circus acrobatics (to the reverberant squeak of the colour wheel) and never seem off-key with a "saw-pump."

Perhaps they do go to excess in their bickerings of abuse and their indignant reactions to each other's words, but then they partly retrieve their situations themselves admiring with wry humour that indeed "we went too far."

Too slick, too didactic

CAIN'S HAND

by Tony Barstrop

Cain's Hand by Alan McRae-Moor and based by the Director, and Helmut Bakaitis. National Theatre Sydney. Opened 15 May, 1980. Director: Helmut Bakaitis. Musical Director: Lesley O'Connor. Choreographer: Roslyn Indred. Set Design: Michael France. Lighting: Design: David Murray. Stage Manager: John Stevenson. Cast: Mavis Weston-Lane, Bob Purtell, Sophie, Sue Anne Mansfield, Sue Lush, Cecilia Dulich, Janice Lang, Vicki Kean, Jennifer Lutze, Karen Fahey, Ian Basil, Geoffrey O'Connell, Peter Dighorn, Bruce McMillan. Photo: Garry Shead.

When we turn to dream about youth — that most ridiculous of growth periods — it seems increasingly difficult to find places that combine serious intelligence with warmth, humour and, above all, a liberating sense of fun. But then I suppose for many there's nothing very funny about adolescence. Alan McRae-Moor's *Cain's Hand* more or less hangs in on the present, and obvious enough issues. So broad these seem to be that young people use the vacuum of a social environment that reflects the most grotesque of double-standards, especially through the all pervading influence of the media with its Brady Bunch cliché wholeness and inexcusably smugtry-mated coops. Snarly and Hatch style of violence.

But for all its potential inaccuracies here as well as its very neatly expressed idioms (which apparently Northern sun has to warn us about in its advertising) the whole thing was too slick and too didactic. Granted adolescence can be black but it is also

enlivened by a sense of fun and sheer inventiveness and these qualities Cain's Hand lacked in abundance. Above all it lacked a sense of dramatic structure that reached in a rhythmic pace and rhythm and in a meteoric montage as the past parts in. One thinks of equally dark plays

Bertie Keefe's *Ron* in the powerfully compassionate "Getcha" scene from *Grease* (shiver or mere snarl), of the awesome power of Nigel Williams' scathing yet humorously compassionate attack on education and class in *Class Seven*. Closer to home one still recalls vivid moments of John Sarmiento's earthy and witty treatment of this theme in the "cancer" episode from *Mad Sunday* (which all too many in Sydney missed last year).

The static nature of Cain's Hand had much to do with the production and the directorial control. Not that the playing style was at fault (although what might have functioned well in the some high school audience looked mighty out of place in National Opera (a matter I will return to later). Rather one had the impression that director Helmut Bakaitis was himself telling us what "it" was all about. Herewith he rubs the whole cause-effect relationships of the play and production are just too simplistic. Parents at club, kids on the phone, media images of violence become static realities. The danger of this kind of play is that it comes close to glorifying destructive behaviour precisely because it lacks liberating and reforming self-awareness. (The character of Bob could have been more prominent here, I might read like a moral guide but really I think I'd much more like Dan Walker and Gold Coast to carry up the business than write a play about.)

The play is a nappy love-hate to fraternal no-axes. Teenage kids stranded in some coastal town on a bleak Sunday afternoon. The dream in escape to "Sophieland Syndrome", the reality an "oxygen" as Bob's postponed by the arrival of the living, sexually persecuted Bakaitis who the reverberating from his father. Group residues and tensions lead inevitably to the shooting of one of the young males. Another brick in the wall. The production, though, was marred by overextended delivery and slow, pedantic movement that postponed to choreography. The best performance came from Jane Mansfield who seemed to be the only cast member with full vocal clarity and gift movement. She too seemed to be the only capable singer.

Finally, one applauds the idea behind National allowing in Upstage Theatre for outside groups. But the precise reason for this season escapes me. Over the past couple of years there have been several productions around town that could very well have benefited from the use of this

THEATRE / NT

Too good to miss

BUFFALOES CAN'T FLY

by Sue Williams

BUFFALOES CAN'T FLY by Simon Hopkinson. Darwin Theatre Group. Broken Hill, Darwin NT. Opened October 4, 1991. Darwin May 12, 1992. Director: Simon Hopkinson. Designers: Bill Harris, Andrew Pocella. Music: Rand Wilkinson. Stage Manager: Andrew Berlin. Cast: Reginald Raynor, Peter McClose, Leon Marilynne Hangan, Justine Cuthbertson. Photo: Greg

The success of the man from the outback towns of Jalyarru tells the success of Simon Hopkinson's new play, *Buffaloes Can't Fly*, performed by the Darwin Theatre Group. After the first act he went home for a beer but decided the play was too good to miss so came running back.

The play's appeal is its simplicity. It is a clear, direct story told with compassion and humour and based in the Territory reality of its blowhard and failed vegetarians. The dialogue is strong and the appropriate sparse.

Set in Katherine (Katherine emerged only after World War One, this is a play about outback, isolated Australia where dreams have no place). To open up the Territory with a narrative is the vision of Reg Hangan. His energy is contrasted by the courage and despair of his wife, Laura, now far removed from the mirths of Melbourne society. Laura remains outside his fantasy, imposing order with sternness. Marilynne Hangan was properly prim. Peter McClose as Reg finely expressed burning desire becoming burn-out obsession.

It is the bushie, Jack "Dumper" Glover, drawn within the traditions of Australian life, who is reluctantly inspired by the dream. Colin Jacob has conveyed the open charm of practical manhood which is the warm balance to the chill of Laura.

A naked stage magnifies outback, lonely and boundless. The immensity of the land is itself a character, shaping and shadowing those who try to press their will upon it. Pruned of set, the stage is ready for the dream to materialise in a daring and clever design the airplane. Buffalo Flyer, is constructed. Indeed, it is so successful it

momentarily escapes upsetting the actors. Moments of chaos break the tension as the dream starts to emerge in wood and colour. But as the venture becomes impossible the bubble of harmony evaporates.

The stage is left, cluttered with spent dreams.

To the three actors go the kudos for performances that belie their amateur status. And Hopkinson has succeeded in writing and directing a play that has wider appeal than the Territory, although it was commissioned for outback touring. At the Australian Drama Festival in Adelaide in April the production won The Critics Award for Innovation. Simon Hopkinson was awarded Best Script and Marilynne Hangan received Best Performance. It was the company's first venture interstate, and the play's Australian premiere.

But the actors and the director knew the Jimmy test would be reception on the home run. From Alice Springs to Katherine the audience loved it. And in Darwin, the group's home town people rocked and demanded an extended season.



Marilynne Hangan (Laura) and Colin Jacob (Dumper) in Buffaloes Can't Fly

THEATRE/QLD

Mixed style and characterisation

THE CIRCLE

THE GIFT GAME

by Jeremy Ridgman/State Rep.

The Circle by W. Somerset Maugham. Queensland Theatre Company, MTC, Brisbane. Directed by Peter Scott. Opened May 11, 1991.
Maugham: Alan Edwards. Design: Graham Mackie.
Lighting: James Hansen. Stage Manager: Phil Kennedy.
Cast: Arnold Rimmer (Katy), Jonathan Stephen (Hobson), Steve Lynn (Fitzgerald), Michaela Christian (Clement), David Scott (Wolfe), Glynne Howell (Christopher), Roger Rognon (Fitzgerald), Luis Larrivee (Hobson), Philippe Lard (Porter), Barry Lovett (Fitzgerald).

The Gift Game by M. J. Tabora. MTC, with Queensland Arts Council. Opened May 1991.
Director: Ann Fudge. Design: Terry Lawless.
Lighting: William Stanwick. Stage Manager: Brian McLeod.
Cast: Thomas Paine (Candy), Roger Russell (Rake), Michaela Christian (Katy), Barry Lovett (Fitzgerald).

The Circle is this year's excursion by the QTC into English "high" comedy, it marking at the pretensions of the upper middle class and the pretence in love; strangely akin in 1991, depending as it does upon the reawakening of the '20s and the consciousness of a previous generation in touch with the structures of the Victorian era. Moreover Maugham's now dated social comedy seems mainly to epitomise the fate of English playwriting that followed in the wake of Peter Webley and the like.

Lady Katy returns to her carribean home thirty years after running away with a lover, Lord Porticos. Living on the estate is her husband, Cline, and the three sides protagonist discover that history is repeating itself in the form of an affair between the son's wife and a debasing businessman on leave from the colonies. Katy has turned to sketchy self-mockery, her lover to boorish tenderness, but despite these warnings and the threat of social ostracism, the impalavours of youth were the day, the young lovers disappear into the night, with the blessing of Katy and Porticos who can but recognise the same unquenchable idealism that had motivated them in their salad days.

The QTC's production is lively, perhaps too much so in the case of the younger actors who lapse all too frequently into frenetic posturing in an attempt to capture what is presumably intended to be the "style" intrinsic to English comedy of manners. Linton the younger lover,



Clementine Christian and David Phillips in the QTC's *The Circle*.

bounds in through the French windows and bounds out again in a manner obviously calculated to demonstrate that this is the original "Anyone for dinner?" routine. The result is an unappropriately farcical tone which belies the intended moral complexity later displayed in Lister's degradations to his would-be masters. "I don't offer you happiness. I offer you love." Only Barry Lovett really forges a link between style and characterization, but, notwithstanding, David Pomeroy wins sympathy and understanding as well as raving more than a few laughs.

The Guy Gave His Legs Much Stretches is Pulitzer play for writer Bill Cohen and a peerless director by Mike Nichols with two grants of the American stage. Dennis Landy and Blanche Campbell performances to be a rather thin piece of writing. It demands attention over its brief two acts by dint of the marvelous opportunity it offers the two players for developing the nuances of character observation and Leonard Teale and Elaine Cusack, in a production due to tour the state, rise to meet the challenge in fine style.

The premise is simple: two residents in an old people's home meet on the back porch to play go-rounds, a game in which he pretends to be an expert but in which she admits dithering ineptitude. It has gradual annoyance and eventual, apoplectic rage, she can do nothing but win. In these stereotypically predictable confrontations their parts are reversed and with

them a picture of failure and self-disgouement. Mercifully, the play achieves sensitivity to the last moment, mutual sympathy with impatient antagonism. If the play's climax, in which Teale staggers off with crutch, is overstatement it is because the extension of the two-hander does not allow such an event to be played with convincing realism.

One's only criticism of the performance is that Blanche Cusack, lacking the lead-star, as it were, of Leonard Teale's grizzled beard, fails at times to convince one of her age. The actors balance perfectly, Teale's crookedly impertinent and his childlike rants providing a sustained abrogate for Cusack's weary refuge in giddiness.

Strengths and weakness of collaboration

SHIZENFRENZY

by Veronica Kelly

Shizenzenshi a production produced based on *A Council of Fools* by Shakespeare. T. S. Eliot and Bertolt Brecht. Old Spiegeltent, Birch Mead, Birch Street, lighting Paul Hender, stage, Michael Tilly, music, Robert Arthur, Andrew Blackstock, Geoff Cawthron, Paul Blaauw, Sean Mac Lennan, Graham Brown, Alan Petty, James Potter, John Bush, Roger Hartmann, photo research.

The T.S. Company's third production for the year is a gaudily-crafted design exercise based on *A Council of Fools* and unifying the diverse talents and skills of the Company members. Music, acrobatics and multiple costume and set changes punctuate the unfolding of the familiar plot with witty, untranslatable signs of characters that no the audience, a musical sing-a-long, a huge motor boat ride inside the theatre, the cast juggle and lead characters of "Beautiful Queensland" with telephone and bellringing accompaniment.

Amidst these diversifications the Bertolt and Cyril complications proceed along lines which suggest sometimes a localization of Shakespeare, sometimes a screen and sometimes a simple reproduction of the original text which leaves elements like disease, gold chains and abbey's prominently intact at the new embankment.

Errol and Cyril, country and western arias baying from Augathella, arrive at Injune harbour to look around. Of course Injune possesses not only a small C and W but its own Errol and Cyril Land before long the watelogs are being exchanged and gradually taken. The basic idea of localiza-

tion is very pressing. Where it is conveniently observed and readily interpreted it is not only extremely funny but very well.

Sean Mac and Geoff Cawthron, playing the young pair, create confident, sharp-edged characters which are believable as Australian comic types and by no means patronized. The nuances of their relationship suggest fractious approbation and their acrobatic and inventive fight are the high point of a show where physical virtuosity is flamboyantly displayed by all the cast.

However, something appears to go wrong with the idea of localization. The Delusions of Injune turns out to be bursting with colourful characters assembled from every theatrical age and tribe. Bertly the amorous spouse is from Old Vienna, Injune Bert and Cyril are Mexican, a Dell South Beemer, Cockney sparmer, Wizard of Oz acrobats and Courtney square rob accents with a heated Fing and snarled roared me.

These characters aren't composed of as creditable local equivalents of the Ephesian originals. They don't integrate to form a unified comic environment but divide the joke through noise effects which distract rather than concentrate the show's unguessed promise. My mind turned back nostalgically as it frequently does — to the superlative *Closetiroom*, also a corporately-derived show based around physical skills. There however the characters, situations and routines were mainly and consistently observed from the local scene to produce a comic world which was effectively indigenous. *Shizenzenshi* could benefit by a clear and disciplined appraisal of its aims and material in order to rid itself of those self-endulging brainstorms which derive from theatre as a memory or two, rather than from a social reality that can provide Bertly, Cyril and the masses with paid ground from which their colourful and bizarre can bounces and dance skyward.

Both the strengths and weaknesses of the show spring possibly from its collaborative method of creation. The actors have full measure of disciplined physicality plus the generous ensemble coherencies which is the hallmark of the new T.S. style, but maybe after all, shows do need writers. Still lots in its surprising, which relies exclusively on groovy puns and Knock-Knock jokes. Hence the show underneath itself.

However no doubt the show will be long and deservedly remembered for some of the best musical and clowning energy seen for a long time in professional theatre here. For my part, I'm anticipating T.S.'s next production, *Starved Rock* based with a promising new element provided from within the company itself — writers.

Mr. E. Shyam

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THEATRE/SA

Great expectations

LULU

by Michael Morley

Lulu by Frank Wedekind adapted and directed by Lynn Neave. State Theatre Company, Playhouse, Adelaide SA. Opened June 5. (146)

Deborah Ann Sherman, Sue Ann Thomas, Carolyn Lazarus (right), Lynette Wild Lovings, Stage Manager: Constance Johnson. Cast: Schon (Michael Rotherman), Schwarz (Geoffrey Thornton), Gott (John Young), Lulu (Judy Davis), Anna (Brenda Butler), Rosalie (Julia Wood), August (Ralph Cummins), Gustavus (Barry Hunter), Berthold (John Gammie), Magdalene (Margot Flack), Bergersohn (Peter Taylor), August (Barry Kitch), Rosalie (Suzanne Cokely). (Professional)

During his lifetime, Frank Wedekind suffered severely at the hands of contemporary performers. His views on director were rather more complimentary.

but then he was lucky enough to have had Karl Kraus and Max Reinhardt taking him seriously. Much of the same sort of comment could be made about Jim Sherman's production of *Lulu*: it is a brave effort, with many good directional touches and some fine performances. But overall, it comes out on doing full justice to Wedekind's text.

Some of the weaknesses and unevenness can be attributed to Lynn Neave's adaptation, which reduces Wedekind's two plays to two and a half hours' playing time. Of course there is ample justification for condensing *Earthbound* and *Pandora*. But into one play Wedekind turned (as in the last decade of his life, Pates followed suit in his film version) and Berg's heroic is a wonderful example of an opera composer's sense of dramatical aptness. But Neave seems not to much to have "dumbshowed" (as Shaw put it, speaking of Ibsen's cuts to Shakespeare) Wedekind, as reflected in and thrown away the bones of the dramatic structure.

His assertions — mostly cabaret songs — are well-chosen and effective (though the added piano score is surely a misjudgment). But because so much of Wedekind's dialogue has been purged away, the audience is left somewhat bemused by the development of the plot-line, which becomes even more episodic and dispersed than in the original. To take but one example, it is difficult in Neave's version to follow the logic of Lulu's rise (in Act 1) and fall (in Act 2). But this sequence depends on her relationship with Dr Schon. Schon acts as her conscience and

arms to society in Act 1 with his death. Lulu is easier prey for the men in Act 2. This is not the same as saying that Schon controls her, but just as it is inevitable that he will destroy himself through her, it is clear that without Schon, Lulu will be exploded by those around her. Once she kills the man she fought so persistently, she deprives herself of the good that sustained her and gave her such vitality in Act 1.

The sense of incalculability is well caught by Judy Davis in Act 2, as are the vulnerability and vitality which characterize the Lulu of the first half. In fact all the "pink" qualities in Lulu's makeup are sustained without exaggeration — her persistency, her coquettishness, her teasing of Schwarz and Hugenberg. But Lulu is

something more (and less) than a teenage vamp, she is a cipher on which each of the men sketches his own idealized figure. And it is this inappropriateness, vesting in the anonymous and the enigmatic, which is lacking in Ms Davis' reading of the part. Lulu is beyond good and evil, and the almost mythical and quasi-metaphysical aspect of the character receives little attention. Of course, the role of Lulu is difficult to catch in performance, but Neave's adaptation could have made things easier for the performer by retaining more of Wedekind's dialogue in which the aspect was referred to.

The positive qualities of Judy Davis' Lulu are her energy, her sense of presence, her readiness to throw herself into scenes



Michael Rotherman (Schon) and Judy Davis (Lulu) in the SFC's *Lulu*

— qualities Wedekind would have admired. For him, the prime requirement for a performer was that he tackle a part as if they were riding a cross-country race. Too few of the actors in the production came close to the horseman-like exaggerated ideal. What it does not mean is that the actor throws himself into the part and blurts away in all directions. It has much to do with concentration, energy and the tackling of difficulties, and tends to do with unfeigned physical behaviour or vocal expression.

Both Kerry Walker's Geschehwa and Robert Griffith's Esmeray showed the value of refusing to the easy way to a role. The former's combination of composed — albeit a composer arrived at with difficulty (the character, not the performer!) — and passion was conveyed with subtlety and conviction. Only a tendency to deliver sections of her final speech to the audience gained manipulative. And Robert Griffith's un-legged Esmeray was yet another marvellous contribution to this actor's gallery of unforgettable characters. If there are other actors of his age in Australia with his range, presence, vocal and physical skills, I have yet to see them. His Esmeray was no mere collection of caricatured traits, but a bizarre, frenzied and quite uncanny characterization in a sense, he came closest to that just position of the cerebral and the unsettling which lies at the heart of Wedekind's drama. If his Carr-Purvis seemed less clearly characterized, that last part of this is attributable to Wedekind himself.

With the exception of John Brailey (especially good as Dr Goll), Ralph Cottrell (who had his moments as Schigolch), John Wood and Margaret Davis, the other performances were execrable. Malcolm Robertson's Schwan was disappointing in place of several fascination and the "broad intelligence of a heart of prey" (Wedekind), he had stock-cladness-bluster and the behaviour of a demagogued macho-kebab. And Geoffrey Cleasby's Schwanz and Brendon Burke's Alwa are best forgotten; the latter, in particular, was hardly recognizable as the character Wedekind (or Nagval) created. Few, unconvincing and totally unconvincing as an antagonist either for his father or for Lulu.

Brian Thomson's design — a vast cavernous, red-marbled arched, two-masted side and three in the middle — was effective, though ultimately a little undifferentiated. It served well for the curtain scenes and the underhanded-but-arched death of Lulu at the end, but it fared less well into the smaller, more intimate scenes, tending rather to dwarf the performers. And Louisiana Armstrong's costumes were a mixture of the effective (Lulu's mini-Pierrot costume) and the incongruous (her bony) sometimes, there was a decided smell of the film wardrobe in

characters swept on and off.

Jim Sherman's undoubted strengths as a director in his visual sense and fluid, and he cleverly found a series of image-correlations for Wedekind's world of explores and explored. But one is left with a feeling of dissatisfaction and a wish that both director and designer could have placed more trust in Wedekind's theatrical sense. This does not mean a slavish adherence to the original, simply a readiness to look for the problems and not iron them out. Nowhere it seems to me, is this better exemplified than in the death of Sibyl in Wedekind. Lulu dictates the line — "You are the only man I ever loved" — a precise objectification of feeling — and after the dying Sibyl clings to when he calls for water (at *Cleopatra* on the cross). In Sherman's hands the expression of feeling is personified — "You are the only man I ever loved" — and all the beauties and disturbing sexual business is gone. Wedekind, I would venture to suggest, knew better — at least, in this case.

Worthy of children

GOLDEN VALLEY
by Chris Westwood

Golden Valley (by Dorothy Hewitt, MURPHI, Alan Flavin, Company, Playhouse, Adelaide SA. Opens Sat 7 Feb). Music: Jim Lawrie. Director: Michael Munn. Design: Peter Russell. Lighting: Nagi Iriyagi. Performers: Helen Bullock (Gretchen), Marlene May, Cecilia Baker (Alice), Michael Paul (Hermann), Geoff Ryall, Michael Freedman. Photo: Michaela.

What a break for kids that they should have a play written for them by Dorothy Hewitt! More power to Mags for commissioning this writer, who says no one ever asked her to write for kids before. The play is marvellous, picking up on a theme with Nick English tried last festival with *Any Day Now*ability.

In the hands of a writer who does not take children seriously, this story could seem empty, but, in *Golden Valley*, Dorothy Hewitt has captured a rich Australian sense developed rounded and complex characters, added every magic trick in theatre and mixed it all up with a convoluted dense plot. The play, and production demands children's thoughts, full attention and excited delight.

It opens one evening, in the outback town and pharmaceuticals. At night, the four older transmogrify into bush animals. Aunt Jane becomes the Croc, Aunt Eva the Wombat, Uncle Ned the Possum. Uncle Oh the Platypus. As they float from their beds, huge shadows of their alteregos rise behind an eggshell screen. As dawn

breaks, they recede back into their usual rather eccentric human forms, and decide they want a child. Aunt Jane is delegated to visit an arborist to find an acacia and walked home with the Mother Superior follows, and Aunt Jane ends up with scrappy little Marigold — the red headed child no-one else ever wanted.

To try to explain this plot further or the amazing convolutions would be to weaken the subtle and power of the theatricality of the play and ruin many surprises. It is like other *COME ON*, it is complete, full of song and dance as well, with an excellent sound score from the man who brought you the music of *Matilda* Jim Cotter.

The crumpling of images and shifting of forms underlines the theme throughout: anything is possible, as the audience is taken in and out of realms of fantasy and reality. A cat changes into which she flies off on broomsticks, an old gold-digger fades in from the past, a Maribyrnong Man comes in from above, a rock singer appears in Marigold's bedroom, the chair falls down a well to emerge clinging to the skeleton of a long-lost sister of the family. Wild stuff, but creative and dramatic, poetic and challenging for kids.

Three actors deserve to be singled out. Marilyn Allen who plays Aunt Jane, combines a grey haughty severity with a warm down-to-earth kindness. Her performance is disciplined, intelligent and powerful. Jack Yearrell the angular and predatory villain, is played very well by Maggie's namesake Geoff Ryall. Igor Sam, the image boy, has a presence and power in his very demanding role, requiring gammarush, singing and constant character changes. Maggie is an extraordinary ensemble — such a good fitting of commitment and professionalism prevails.

It is, however, hard to transfer from the intimacy and nature of their theatre-in-education style to the sprawling stage of The Playhouse, and some actors seemed strained to blow up their characters into almost caricature to cope with it. Helen Bullock's Marigold, for example, is played in a rather silly "Little Cleopatra" manner. Perhaps the too literal nature of Malcolm Munn's direction aggravated my sense that the play much liked easy poetic division to bring the characters to life in a way which makes a virtue, not a vice of eccentric humanity. Similarly the constant shifting of focus in the first half of the play should be made integral to the production rather than seeming awkward. Dorothy Hewitt's gentle sense, caught irony and love of what is quintessentially Australian has to be reflected in a directorial mode which gives kids room to move.

For all these reasons, though, it is a real pleasure to go to a children's play and see the same level of craft, commitment and joy in theatre that one mightn't see in the



Marion Baker (Dame Anna) in *Improvisation* and *Maid to Marry*. Photo: David Holmes

world's best theatre for adults. Colfer Baker has good writing, ideas and responses to the culture it comes from, musical invention in performance, and excellent design (he once claimed to appear to think that children only want "a bit of colour and movement" but Sue Russell

and Nigel Lessing present here a art which despite having to double with *Pygmalion* is inspired, witty and seduced to the writing).

Maggs has commissioned a major Australian work, worthy of children I hope they do again next time!



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THEATRE/VIC

Expressionist Strindberg

DANCE OF DEATH

by Suzanne Spenser/State Rep.

Dance of Death by August Strindberg. Uptown Theatre, The Playbox, Melbourne Vic. Opened 26 May 1981.

Translated and directed by Roger Pulvers, Set and Costume Designers: Peter Corrigan, Stage Manager: Michael Mackay, Souvenir.

Cast: Peter Gary Files, Alice Maggie Miller, Ruth, Ruth's Mother, Alice's Cousin, David Kendall (Professionals)

With this production of Strindberg's *Dance of Death* director Roger Pulvers has returned to that dark territory he first charted for Melbourne audiences two years ago with his production of *Miss Julie*. In each case he has made a fresh translation of the play, a preparation which must be of considerable benefit to him as director. Given that Pulvers' own writing and his interest in the Polish and Japanese theatres are predicated on a passion for a theatrical form that is the antithesis of naturalism, his interest in Strindberg must seem surprising, if not perverse. However the evidence of these productions suggests that it is the very transparency of their texts that attracts him, as apprehensively Strindberg is in a way that doesn't simply float reclusive but rather makes us question what we thought we were seeing before.

Pulvers' minimalist realisation of *Dance of Death* is inseparable from an exact plastic execution by designer Peter Corrigan. Pulvers and Corrigan worked together last year on *Buried Child* and in both cases the union has produced unique and exciting results. The natural ambience of the Uptown Theatre at The Playbox is remade into a distorted off-set, however with *Dance of Death* an acute sense of claustrophobia is mandatory and Corrigan uses this bunker-like atmosphere to advantage.

The action is ranged across along two walls in an L shape and the walls are rendered in human and plant to suggest damp and decaying plaster. The few pieces of quasi-painted furniture are painted in ugly colours and pressed against the walls and held there by a web of string to create a *Chirico*-wrapped intense.

It feels as if both the actors and the furniture have been hung against the walls of this cell by a psychological centrifugal force. As Strindberg says, the walls keep person, and for Alice the walls and surfaces

have the same colour. The room increasingly resembles the prison that once was, the characters are no more able to leave it than they are able to break the tortuous bonds of their marriage, and the breath of fresh air can enter to reflect the sickness of habitual hatred.

Kurt's arrival at first promises some relief but ultimately he too succumbs to

(Maggie Miller) stalks the room waiting to pounce on her prey, or the seduction scene between Kurt (David Kendall) and Alice which all seems and later Maggie Miller and Gary Files, as the ill-matched couple inextricably linked by the pang they have inflicted on each other during twenty-five years of marriage, give superbly controlled performances that move between



Gary Files (Kurt), Maggie Miller (Alice) and David Kendall (Kurt) in *Playbox's* *Dance of Death*. Photo: Jeff Bush.

the political air. The mechanical tapping of the telegraph is the only link that Alice and Edgar have with their children and the world and, like a metronome, it seems to measure the distance between them and human contact rather than link the mind to the material.

The sense of enclosed terror and mutual torture — of animals caged together and tearing at one another — is accentuated by the harsh Expressionist lighting. Foot-lighting illuminates the figures from below and produces the deeply etched shadows and haloes of a Munch painting or Nolde's woodcut.

The direction and acting is similarly sparse and mannered and many of the strongest images suggest the animal in the human, as when Edgar (Gary Files) yawns like a panther of the MGM lions or Alice

moments of loud maddens and poignant tragedy.

Whereas I found David Kendall's performance diffuse and out of step with the repeating rhythm of the play. The play's dynamic much a long night of the soul and at the morning finally breaks and the world has been revealed, it seems as if reconciliation is possible and that Alice and Edgar will make peace on the knowledge that Edgar's death is imminent and that their release ensured.

However it would be a denial of the play's complexity to accept this without qualification and with his final image Pulvers cautions that we don't — Alice and Edgar dance a slow waltz locked in each other's arms like dolls on the lid of a music box destined to repeat their twirls until the mechanism runs down.

Rather superficial

BEECHAM

by Colin Duckworth

Written by Carl Reiner and Paul Shaffer
Music by John Williams, Additional by Alan
Ophee (1987) 101
Directed: Alan Alda; Design: Christopher Woods
Lighting: Robert M. Edger; Music: John
Lee Hancock; Stage Management: Sue-Ann and
the crew: Michael Edge
(Photo: Sandy)

Outspoken, eccentric, offbeat, blunt, brilliant, uncompromising, indelible Sir Thomas Beecham could put you down with one well-chosen word or raise you to gleeful heights of performance than ever before. For this he was feared, loved and admired. One of that House of all-learning, self-styled self-governed self-contained energy sources (Balfe, Churchill, I let whom the word 'Wyness' was coined). When these chosen few put their relentlessness at the service of the talents with which they have been gifted, the result is always sublime and inspiring in its feverish intensity.

So impersonal for Beecham is that an impertinence and an impossibility. To have to do so in the form chosen by Carl Reiner and Ned Sherrin is even more so.

small fragments of some one-hour, a string of anecdotes already known to all those with even a passing interest in music no extended dialogue which would allow the impersonator to develop character.

The authors' approach to this immensely complex man is rather superficial. He deserved the kind of profound exploration that Ron Eshel gives in the concertmaster playing *Beecham* but instead he is subjected to a largely fool-laugh treatment. Fair enough, so long as the laughs are forthcoming. The first night was nowhere near as funny for me as Timothy West's pretence in London and for this the director was largely to blame. From the back of the gallery the action kept disappearing from view and it was clear he had taken no account of the sight-lines. Ron Roder should become aware that this tends to make half-distracted spectators feel uninvited and uninterested. There was simply no reason why the downstage area should have been used so much.

Again this performance was marred by David Rivenwood's useless tenor, leading to a few muted links, surging after several previews. However, he hangs over that now and presumably his bass is less tenable. One can sit back and wallow in the salles, and the rigours from the singular Mr Bell poor chap to the harpists' agonising but skillful on a 10-foot Mr Rivenwood puts over Beecham's state of constant anguish with just the right prosthetic anguish dry tones

sustaining the character well through the flattening of the script.

The simplicity of Beecham and Sherrin's structure — the main character plus one Narrator-can-straight man, excellently played by Michael Edge with veracity and tact — enables all the light to be thrown on Beecham, but leaves many facets of his troubled life in the dark, particularly his complicated love affairs and marriages. One would have welcomed some female presence, and any portrayal of Beecham's first remiss, early incomplete wedding.

There are two soggier moments that require attention at the end of Act 1: we have the strings and an arioso-like wail of Mr Rivenwood waiting his station at a tombstone-like cello; or, indeed, the recording of the required British Concerto could be foisted some other rather more robust orchestral piece should be substituted. And then the lesson on Mozart seemed over-long and self-indulgent, failing to reflect on with Beecham's delight in the composer he loved above all others.

Beecham needs to be seen by all those who sometimes feel like giving up the struggle for what they believe in. It rewards one's faith in the ultimate effectiveness of an irreducibly low battle in defense of beauty and excellence in the face of ignorance and apathy. To think that Bell for Beecham's Beecham could be as little known as Alastair Phillips.



David Rivenwood as Beecham and Alan Alda as Beecham's Narrator. Photo: David Morris

Subtle and moving performance

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

by Colin Duckworth

A Man for All Seasons by Robert Bolt. Melbourne Theatre Company. Melbourne, Victoria. Opened 16 May 1981.

Director: Sue Morris. Designer: Paul Hallinan. Lighting designer: James Lomax.

Cast: Tim Conahan (Sir Thomas More), Thomas More (John Hollingshead), Richard Rich (Tom Hughes), Sir Harry (Anthony Hopkins), Alice More (Beverley Dunn), Margaret More (Sally Cahn), Sir Cardinal (Stephen Cross), Thomas Cromwell (Chris Horner), The Ambassador (Robert East), Sir Astell (Stephen Clark), William Roper (Andrew Martin), Sir Kingley (Chris Orton), A Woman (Barb McMillan), Sir Astell's Secretary (Stephen Chambers) (Professional).

He was, and Samwell Johnson of Thomas More, the person of the greatest virtue these islands ever produced. Invariably, human nature and society being what they are, virtue is sacrificed and martyred by the professional administrators, fact-servants, and turncoats. From the Common Man — who summary things to many men, including themselves to More and finally his executioner, an adored survivor in the murky sea of practical living, and played with self-apologise but hard-headed grace by Douglas Hodge — to the arch-English Thomas Cromwell, who becomes in Christopher Hallinan's interpretation the epitome of smooth and utterly ruthless ambition, the prototype of the high-ranking Gestapo officer who apologises in impeccable English while politely requesting that the thumbs-screws be tightened a just a little bit more, perhaps.

The clash of personalities and of ideals provides the drama of many a historical play (Thomas a Becket and Henry II, John of Gaunt and Cauchon, Croon and Antiphort, if that is history, Charles I and Cromwell).

In such case the dramatic power depends on the apparent evenness of the opposing strengths, both in argument and in character. In Robert Bolt's play the absolute ruthlessness of Cromwell is more than adequately balanced by the legalised legal powers of reasoning of More, and yet the stronger case goes, under because it cannot withstand the onslaught of the System. Invariably, we see the net closing round the innocent believer in absolute Justice, gathering up in its entangling loops and threads the wavers — the Common Man, and weak, young Richard Rich (Tom Hughes' high-spirited voice was, to me, deliberately, irritating).

The women do not get very strong parts in this play. Beverley Dunn could not do much with Thomas's wife, Alice, except make her a down-to-earth and not very intelligent housewife, and Sally Cahn's

Margaret, the bluestocking daughter, was lively but unremarkable. Of the other middling parts, Anthony Hopkins's Duke of Norfolk was convincingly rounded and pernicious, as was Stephen's Chancellor's Wilshire. But Chris Orchard did not get beyond hands on hips and bluster as Harry. He had a very creditably earnest, if pedagogic Roper in Andrew Martin, and a too deliberately comic puppet of a Spanish Ambassador from Robert East.

Which leaves us with the Saint himself as an outstandingly subtle and moving performance by Edwin Hodgkinson. Despite occasionally looking and sounding like an



ATP: A Man for All Seasons. Photo: David Parker

offshoot from Roy Dotrice's rendering of Aubrey's *Beef* Lines, he assumed and maintained a quiet, firm, severe dignity, intensely gentle but absolutely uncompromising, and walled these conflicting qualities into a thoroughly satisfying and convincing character of greatness (and audacity) in the courtroom scenes.

The play as presented on the ATP's syllabus, to judge by the number of semi-uninformed young people at the first night, Even those among them who apparently thought they were in a football match to start with were taken fairly quickly — all honour to the director and to Paul Kushner's ingeniously set, watchless (probable, atmospheric and blessedly real without fussiness). Small wonder there was barely a smirched laughter when More kept encouraging Rich to "become a preacher for the quiet life"; a few care-worn signs of the System (and I mean the teachers, not the kids) hardly found that highly amusing as it was intended to be.

The female condition

DODDY FROM HERE TO MATERNITY MOTHBALLS

by Suzanne Spenser

Book: *The Dwyer's Progress*. Concept and music

Score: David Pye. Directed by Dorothy and Pauline Margossian. The Universal Theatre, Melbourne. Opened April 19, 1981. Cast: Margaret Beale and Jenny Ransome. Choreographer: Jenny Carroll. Margaret Beale and Pauline Margossian. Lighting: David Martin. (Professional).

From Here to Maternity. Concept and music score by Sue Ingoldsby. The Barren Lounge, The Comedy Cafe, Melbourne. Opened May 13, 1981. Cast: Bill Readings. No program was seen. Sue Ingoldsby (Professional).

Maternal by Jack Birkhead. Independent Production, Universal Theatre, Melbourne, Vic. Opened May 20, 1981.

Cast: Sue Morris, Douglas, Diana Parker, Lighting: Paul Thompson. Stage Manager: Ruth Coddington. "Mother" made by Laurel Frost. Cast: Alison Venables. Music: Evelyn Krage (Professional).

While Melbourne can no longer boast a Women's Theatre Group, these three new-women shows attest to the legacy of the original WTG in the style of performance, content and method of mitigation, in fact Sue Ingoldsby and Evelyn Krage worked with the WTG during the early seventies.

The *Dwyer's Progress* and *From Here to Maternity* were created by the performers and could be described as auto-biographical theatre. However each performer had created a theoretical objective correlate which detached and removed upon their equally vulnerable sexual states. In their own way both performances were courageous statements which transgressed theatrical conventions and social taboos.

In *The Dwyer's Progress*, Doddy and classic Brechtian alienation devices combined with elements of contemporary performance art to create a gay and challenging piece that was funny and deeply moving. *The Dwyer's Progress* pivoted on the dislocation of content and expectation, the first shift meant that a mixed audience was watching a striptease in a church.

Each of the four dance sequences in the show culminated in a full strip and was punctuated by soliloquies and a voice-over commentary by Doddy describing and analysing the events, attitudes and dimensions of the dances. The four dances she performed constituted a didactical critique of her work over ten years, beginning with the *Spore Dancer* (1971). Zaslawski inspired "The Cape 1970", subtitled "The Surprise", it was followed by "The Mask 1977", "The Escape" which parodied conventional stripping. Her face and hair were masked and she dressed from head to foot in an elaborate costume with exposed her breasts, buttocks and vaginas, thus the strip consisted of revealing the "unimportant parts" — the arms, legs and face.

The third piece, "The Scare 1979" represented an escape into expansive movement and was inspired by her

admiration for the life and art of Isadora Duncan, submitted: "The Dancer" was the moment in her play to be taken to seriously as a dancer. The show ended with "The Fox 1999" expressing the frustrations and anger of being without a form and a space in which to do her work and be herself. The statement of the final piece articulated the double edge of the dancer's subtitle, "A Paradise to No Man's Land".

Sue Ingoldsby's *From Here To Maternal* used the comic device of role reversal to distance the visceral reality of her pregnancy and in so doing that supremely individual experience was universalised and made accessible to an audience. Like *The Steppenwolf's Progress*, *From Here to Maternal* also relied on disclosure — the shock of seeing a pregnant woman performing in a theatre would have been enough, let alone performing before a late night boozey cabaret audience. Ingoldsby's short-spy Bill Rawlings, was an average to unattractive working class blonde who finds himself pregnant. He then took us through a series of funny things that happened to him on the way to his first internal examination by a female gynaecologist and his encounter with that unflappable organisation, The Nursing Mother's Association.

Indeed the redeatable Bill, looking like a benevolent Oliver Hardy, conducts a Cook's tour of the nuts de passage of maternity and even entices an audience member to assist at a simulated Le Bovier birth (the brother was that French movie actor with the soothing voice). Ingoldsby's performance was a superb, comic, Chaplinesque *sort de foire* and reached an apogee in the consummation of an apparently terrible concession of Sara Lee raspberry shortcake topped with cream and green aphrodisiacs.

From Here To Maternal was a brilliantly executed piece that delivered its form of salvation as carefully timed custard puffs.

At first Jack Hibbard's *Mouthfulls* seems to create a similar disclosure in the figure of Rosetta Vandeville Smith, a woman who deserves both the coffin and the memory of her dead husband. Ashly, through her spirited refusal to behave in the manner failing.

Mouthfulls is described as a comic pantomime and the woman's name is intended to connect three types of women and three corresponding theatrical styles of mounting — Greek tragic, vaudevillian and Austral ordinary. Certainly we receive a liberal dose of the latter two, but ultimately those forms overwhelm the play in a welter of vulgar and increasingly obvious jokes so that the possibility of Rosetta expressing any real grief or pain let alone of Greek dimensions is discounted. For the first fifteen minutes her famous

pattern of associative, alliterative jokes on jokes was quite funny and Evelyn Knap's performance under Ros Horwitz's direction was subtle and suggested that deeper and perhaps more desperate things were being held at bay in the comedy.

However from the moment she opened the coffin and kept it for a final macabre consummation any potential for the glimpse of a tragic underside was gone, the metaphor lost impetus and direction and became weary and predictable. Obviously it could still have been an occasion for pure absurdism but unfortunately it simply did not have enough ideas underpinning it. We were left with a sense of verbal French polishing and no furnaces beneath.

Rogers' performance similarly diminished from the gestures and mannerisms she has used in other plays — particularly her memorable portrayal of Hibbard's Melba. It felt as if both the writer and the performer were not searching themselves, nor venturing into new areas but relying on the successful formulae of their past.

Intense and engaging theatre

I AM WHO YOU INFER

by Cathy Peake

I Am Who You Infer Paula Dickinson as Performer La Mama Theater Milwaukee Opened May 21, 1991 Directed and designed by Meredith Rogers and Barbara Czerniak. Presented by Meredith Rogers.

Very little is known about Emily Dickinson's life. Yet so much speculation about her relationships, her poetry and her social circumstances has been published, it is something of a thrill to discover a dramatic portrait of the famous writer which refuses to be simple and/or biocentric explanations for her genius.

Indeed *I Am Who You Infer* as its title suggests, doesn't really look for explanations at all. Directed and designed by Meredith Rogers and Barbara Czerniak, it uses letters, poems and the occasional narrative aside to reconstruct the parameters of the poet's physical and mental worlds.

It is a daunting and perhaps impossible task. But the great strength of the production lies with its ability to present the poet in a manner that is both poignant, economical and moving without ever falling into the melodrama of distress and isolation which so many of Dickinson's biographers and commentators seem to have created for her.

Whether the Rogers-Czerniak interpretation of her life with its carefully balanced passages of wit, gaiety, restlessness and pain is the right one is difficult to

discover, and, in the final analysis, probably not very important. What is important is the way in which they have conserved the rich variety of Dickinson's imagination, and, in the space of what seems a very short hour, have directed the audience's attention to the vitality, precision and sheer emotional power of her poetic language.

Skilfully performed by Meredith Rogers, who both maintains a lucid distance from her subject and insists upon its engaging



Meredith Rogers as Emily Dickinson in *I Am Who You Infer* at La Mama. Photo: Jacques Devos.

with the more elusive of her emotions — especially through the poems, the whole is developed into a dense, dramatic model for the intriguing and self-contained world of Dickinson's consciousness.

In these hands, Emily Dickinson emerges as wistful, enigmatic, at times playful, at times, the wide ranging, colourful relevance of the script being magnificently complemented by a design which effectively closes off the ordinary world, reinforcing the moral and "frightened" nature of the poet's life.

Rogers structures her performance with "Sonatas" which she uses to light and vary what might otherwise have been a dim and indigestible lung of nineteenth century language. She collects poems from shelves and corners around the room, she arranges flowers — which are actually small branches of lily-of-the-valley and campanula trees, but most of all she arranges and re-arranges charts as if to evoke an imaginary social world or to give shape to the passionate dialogue Dickinson habitually conducted with herself.

The result of all this is intense and engaging theatre, slightly flawed, perhaps, by one or two awkward transitions from poem to letter within the script, but certainly one that uses this powerful book to the book's fullest and the poet with renewed interest.

THEATRE/WA

Questions of attitudes

ANSWER

THE ELEPHANT MAN

by Collin O'Brien

Body by James Gossard, Multnomah Falls Park WA,
Opened April 21 (1911)
Deceased Stephen Berry Dwyer, Corp. Bassett,
Stage Director, Higher Education
Cremated April 21, 1911, Hiram, Oregon
Died April 19, 1911, Hiram, Oregon, Max Fawcett

The Hopkins Show is Presented by Bernard Pomeroy Presents
Theatre Hopkins, 4700 Bloor St. W. (Opened May 16, 1951).
General Manager, Barry Langley; Stage Manager, Peter
Langley; Domestic Head Stage Manager, George

Thomas
One-Two-Three, The Hawks, The Green Regiment
Sugary, Lou, Jay Ward, Merril, Robert and
Markinsberg, Mr. David, Klemens, Rudi and Ruth
Hell, Holly Hunter, John Piper, Tim Walker, Ulfhake
Charles Reynolds
Charles Russell
Charles Russell

Let me begin by declaring an interest: in the mid-1980s I directed the first Australian production of James Bond's early play *Never Too Late Song To You and A Song Of Mine*. I therefore feel I am more familiar than most with his vision of it.

His brief gay Soeder comes too early, preoccupying into middle age. He sees his as precious in spite of the pain, and afraid because ultimately meaningless. Any attempt to find and state what life is about is doomed to failure because it is a pleasureless, painful and ugly truism, having us where we began.

Saunders brings together two married couples who ten years previously had a disastrous brace of double-blitzers affairs with one another. Schoolmaster Merryn (Alan Cudlitz) and his wife Anne (Ursula Lomborg), an increasingly impulsive actress, can still draw blood and seep solace at home. The other couple David and Helen (Clare and Jerry David) have found the answer in the Therapy, but for the Nones, sleep back from hassles and obfuscations, including drink. Secretly, but at the price of commitment and personal interaction, whether home or host.

Mervyn is waiting to hear from the hospital that the life support system has been turned off for a student of his who deliberately rode his motorcycle into a brick wall and turned himself into a vegetable. The boy was an amiable nuisance who agonized about poetry and so on, but when finally could not bear to live, Mervyn argues that the pain and the poetry go.

high a price for foregoing the work of a
trained Mechanicals.

The play in quite frankly a debate about mostly present partly verbal. Many people found in the room had language with an agenda and acting all round and right down to it. Stephen Barry. I liked it, although I would admit now going after a large metal or half-boozed or both. I have no objection to pleasure which makes demands of concentration and comprehension rather than overt conflict and prioritized message. And if the project to encounter about the meaning of

episodes to estimate too much build-up of emotion. While we admire Merrick's courage, native intelligence and why humour, we are largely ineffective in response. But I am sure *Pomona* imagined that his Geppetto name "Bauding" — very Brueghel in flavor too — should be projected on a screen with the appropriate score, captions and comment on the action, ironically and otherwise. As it was, they were only projected on the programme, so that one had either to struggle to read them in the dark, or forgive that silence. This had made the whole atmosphere



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It is that there are measures, perhaps, as *Guardian* suggests, it is still a can that is much easier to be removed.

Not a great deal needs to be said at this stage to *Theater Assepoester* readers about *The Elephant Man*, especially a production which boasts the first central performance of Robert van Mackelenbergh. But one or two comments about the play in its *Blackhouse* version from a man who has seen it

The playwright's decision to have the actor name John Merrick's gross deformities was good artistic judgement. An attempt at make-up and padding would only draw attention to itself as sham, or seriously spoil the very suspense! The play succeeds.

Playwright Bernard Pomerance is clearly influenced by Bertolt Brecht, and it is not surprising to learn he has adapted *A Man's a Man*. He has effectively followed his mentor in the use of alienation effects.

But rather than merely consider

Very MacKenzie's performance was counterpointed by Vic Hawkins as the bearded but paternalistic Victorian doctor who befriended Marmet. Sir Frederick Treves, Esmeray Barrell ingeniously handled the part of Mrs. (Madge) Kendal, the popular actress who introduced Marmet into the theatrical social circles in London.

The play is a subtle work which goes far beyond mere compassion and admiration for a deformed man's heroism. It questions not only Vigoroso's attitudes but ours, suggesting that we sometimes see in deformity the spiritual "heavy heart" we all carry within us. It is a specifically theatrical experience, the sort of work that depends on the particular rapport between live actors and live audience. It is tragic that such theatre should have been undermined by playwrights such as Brecht, Beckett and Pinter in this age of superfluous ecological

Commitment to style

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

RING AROUND THE MOON

by CHI Gilman

The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde
Presented by Mason Miller, Oregon Theatre Fund
Perth, Opened April 19, 1981

Director, designer, Raymond Ondrean; lighting, John Spokes; properties, Jane Stannan; set, Ross Stapp; manager, Lloyd Gossage; stage, Glynis Bell; cast: Worthing, Gerald Blackett; Algernon, James Bond; Cecily, Neville Trade; Merriman, David Gossage; Lane, Glyn Stapp; Lady Bracknell, Jane Ryland; Gwendolen, Leah Taylor; Cecily, Jane Ryland; Miss Prism, Pauline Chapman
(Photo: Murray)

Ring Around the Moon by Jean Anouilh, Perth Actors' Company, St. Georges Theatre, Perth WA, Opened April 20, 1981

Director, designer, Ken Campbell-Dobbin; choreography, Barry Joseph; lighting, John Balman; stage manager, Christine Paul; cast: Hugh, Paul English; Rose, Elizabeth; Barbara Blackett, Isobelle Sarah Cally, Michael Molly, Warwick, Diana, Francesca, Michaela; Mrs. Lady Julie, Michelle Shaw, Carolyn, Robin Miller; Joanne, Joanne Dark; Cecily, Merriman, Bertie, Bertie, Peter, Michael Chapman, Kristina, Robert Parry.
(Photo: Murray)

In a week of production openings quite remarkable for Perth (no less than four productions within two or three days) two stood out particularly, by reason of the commitment of the companies concerned to the idea of style. The plays concerned, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Anouilh's *Ring Around The Moon* (in the Christopher Fry translation) are both pieces which, though based in the genre of romantic comedy, are essentially concerned to intersect the limitations of the genre by shifting the focus from content to style.

Raymond Ondrean's second venture for Mason-Miller is as distinguished as the first in terms of clarity of educational vision and efficacy of design. The innovation of the acting area to the front of the Oregon's thrust stage, with a succession of elegant screens and minimal changes of furniture to suggest the different focuses of the action, emphasised the audience's sense of intense contact with the verbal art of Wilde's creatures. A strong sense of Edwardian opulence was suggested by the octagonal floor pattern and the tastefully chosen furniture and costumes, but the remained suggestion and did not (as I've seen occur in other productions) distract attention from the play itself by over-fussiness. Ondrean's understated touches (where comedy is detected) of finely orchestrated and quite subtle general counterpoint were all over the production, but at no point did they cause any

imbalance through disruption of the timing and pace of the performance.

Among a group of performances distinguished by intelligence and a real sense of rhythm for Wilde's wit, those by Jim Bean as Algernon and Jane Sydney as Lady Bracknell were particularly notable. Bean, as Jack Chorley in Charles's *As You Like It* and now as Algernon, has shown himself possessed of a real gift for stylised comic acting, a gift which belies his relative inexperience. Jane Sydney turned her consistently great experience to good account in delivering a Lady Bracknell so authentically ridiculous as anyone could desire (that doggerel-epitaph).

Leah Taylor's Gwendolen was a well executed and well rounded exercise in timeliness and precision of line placement, while John Moody enhanced his growing reputation as one of Perth's finest young actors with a vivacious yet tough Cecily. The famous tea party dialogue between these two was one of the highlights of the production. As Miss Prism and Canon Chasuble, Fatin Clappas and Neville Trade had even more of the strength of expression to the high-gloss finish of the production. The one minor flaw in the production was I thought in Gerald Blackett's Jack, delivered in excellent style, but interpreted at just a shade too pernicious for my taste.

One could sum up by saying that this was a "safe" production of a "safe" play for those who will see their first *Earnest* at this production, the Belgian magic will be there by virtue of the matchless skill with which it is directed and performed. For those, like myself, for whom the play has become something of an old familiar, there is the pleasure of hearing some of the funniest lines in English comedy delivered with the panache, elegance and inventiveness they deserve.

Far less safe, in every way, was the Perth Actor's Company's production of *Ring Around The Moon*. Anouilh's blithely off-beat box office bankruptcy of *Wise Men* (not on high school English syllabuses one thing) and the Actor's Company's manifestly not possessed of the resources to compete with Mason-Miller in such matters as promotion, publicity and lavishness of design. For all that, their *Ring Around The Moon* is very fine indeed.

Director Ken Campbell-Dobbin was also responsible for the design, which made a virtue of economy, and offered a spare, elegant minimalist winter garden as the basic focus for the intrigues of the play's Parisian high-society characters. Campbell-Dobbin found, and walked with grace and intent, a thin line between extravagant commedia-style caricature and an amorphous (given the implausibilities of the plot and Anouilh's caricature)

ness about characterisation) naturalism of playing.

Working with a largely inexperienced cast of amateurs and semi-professionals Campbell-Dobbin managed to elicit a remarkably high and even standard of performance. One of the stated aims of the Actor's Company "to provide a platform for young actors and actresses to develop by experiencing a variety of roles and production styles" is fully vindicated in the superb performance of Paul English. In the demanding dual role of Hugo Fosberg, English is at the very centre of the production, and he brings qualities of intelligence, sensitivity and brilliant timing to the task that prove him to be one of the most exciting new talents to emerge in quite a long while in Perth Theatre. Balancing the fine piece of work was Barbara Blackett's beautifully controlled Madame Desommes, a performance graced by a marvellous speaking voice. The inexperience of some of the other performers showed most I think in the area of voice projection.

It seems that the Perth Actor's Company has as yet only in tenacity held on the possibility of becoming a permanent part of Perth Theatre life, due to hard financial facts. Perth theatregoers should do all in their power to ensure that the group stays with us, it is a matter of enlightened self-interest the support of a company which on the evidence of their two major productions so far is eminently worthy of support.

WINTER THEATRE

A Season of 3 Plays

Ghosts and Accidental Deaths of an Anarchist by Bertolt Brecht

Commissar! by Bertolt Brecht's The Circular

The Girl Who Loved6 Political Ideas by Bertolt Brecht

Lysistrata by Aristophanes

The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare

BOOKS



by John McCallum

Gentleman George and Canadian plays

Gentleman George: King of Melodrama, by Eric French, University of Queensland Press, pp \$14.95

After Abraham, by Ron Chudley

Abrola, by Gaston Charkiewicz

The Primary English Class, by Israel Horowitz

Shaws, by David French

All Talonbooks, distributed by Currency Press, pp \$4.95 or \$5.95

George Durrell, 19th century actor-manager and author, once said "There are only two plays, so-called nowadays, *Hamlet* and *The Seven Sacraments*." He might be known, he wrote one of them. And 19th century critics, although perhaps not going quite so far, seem partly to agree with him. *The Seven Sacraments* is the best known 19th century Australian play, and, in spite of the fact that 19th century critics thought that melodrama was not "legitimate", the form that Durrell based his entire career is the one that attracts the most attention now. All those writers of 19th century "legitimate" plays (their names for the moment except) must look down now in horror as Australia's *National Theatre Magazine* turns to review a whole book on the vulgar and superficial work of "Gentleman George".

Durrell was colourful, energetic, popular, ambitious and hard-working. In 10 years he rose from being an obscure young bohemian interested in amateur theatricals to become a leading actor, playwright, manager, producer and entrepreneur. He hitched his wagon to the star of melodrama and his career rose, until when melodrama went out of fashion, fell with it. He had the resilience to devote a lifetime to developing and improving a firm (melodrama) and a theatrical system (based on the central actor-producer) which time changing economics and technological

developments were to prove, for the theatre at least, a dead end. With the rise of film and of the big monopolistic firms of I.C.W.s, Durrell's sort of theatre declined. Durrell himself lived in obscurity for the later part of his life, and eventually ended it by going on what he called in a note left for a friend "a long voyage" — set into the sea.

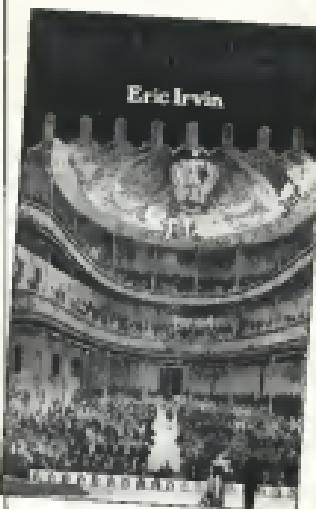
The Seven Sacraments is the only one of Durrell's 13 (yes 13!) plays which survives and unlike many other 19th century theatre pieces, he left behind no papers, diaries or manuscripts for study. Eric French has managed to piece together (mainly

British) a guesswork. The main action narrates the events leading up to the battle, using familiar types of characters: the noble but flawed commander (Wolfe and Monckton), the giddy, the indecent, cynical aristocrat, divided anti-slavery camp, trustworthy common soldiers, shiftless Scoundrels and courtesans and couriers. Perhaps all the great historical battles really were fought by people like that. There are plenty of unseen shots and shouting soldiers off.

Abrola, by Gaston Charkiewicz, is an excentrically lyrical dialogue for an old Quebecois couple, celebrating their 33rd (yes 33rd!) anniversary in a tiny decrepit apartment in Montreal, where they have remained to see their days, raising of their country and their language. They dance, giggle, remember their past, and prepare (significantly) for supper, as they wait anxiously for their fashionably children to phone. Their almost metaphysical passion for each other makes Paulette and Francois in *Threepenny Novel* look very cold fish indeed. The play sets up the joyful passion of their first love, 33 years previously at their wedding, and then manages to convince us that this has grown steadily ever since, so that by the time we see their love is a cosine. Now they prepare for another sort of passage — the last.

Israel Horowitz's *The Primary English Class* is not the sort of play that could have been written by just anyone. The central comic device is a "local idiom" English class for immigrants with seven characters (speaking, respectively, Polish, Italian, French, German, Chinese, Japanese and English) not one of whom can understand anything any of the others are saying. It is brilliant conception, very cleverly worked out. The audience is helped along occasionally by the voice of godlike Translator, but even the Translator have trouble. The class, naturally enough, degenerates rapidly — not helped much by the paranoid African teacher who refuses to let her terrified and bewildered students leave the room for fear of a rapist in the corridor. It is one of the funniest plays I have read for a long time. It must be rather difficult to cast.

Abra, by David French, is a play about the theatre, with a play-within-a-play and a cast of actors who are pretty about it (the play-within-the-play), that is, although who knows? "Once all themes in this crits have very little that is useful or interesting to contribute, so there doesn't seem much else I can say."



From newspaper accounts, a fascinating account of his career. The publishers claim that this is a fresh critical assessment of Durrell's work, but the book is really a plausibly journalistic reconstruction of the life and of the exciting theatre world only just being rediscovered, in which it was lived.

Also this month there are four new plays from the Canadian publisher Talonbooks, distributed here by Currency Press. *After Abraham*, by Ron Chudley, is an historical drama in the old school, boosted for modern taste by the inclusion of two ghosts who argue heatedly about where they are and what it's like being dead. Then attempt to analyse the historical meaning of the Battle on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 (which was decisive in turning Canada

ACT

THEATRE

CANBERRA THEATRE (4977600)

Foyer Lunchtime plays, *Theatre Playing Our Songs* by Jennifer Campbell July 13-24, *A Slave of Reciprocity* by Don Melles July 27-Aug 7

PLAYHOUSE (4964880)

Canberra Philharmonic Society *Music & Movies* July 19-29 REED HOUSE

THEATRE WORKSHOP (4707611)

Japan TIE presents *For Some Fun* (pre-schooler) and *The Zoo Show* (upper primary) Two group-directed shows to be presented at various locations throughout July Producer Graeme Brown

THEATRE THREE (4742221)

Samson or the Strength Doff by Ray Leader, Director, Pamela Roachung Wed-Sun, July 13-Aug 8

DANCE

CANBERRA THEATRE (4976000)

Australian Ballet *The Three Musketeers* July 1-4

Canberra Dance Ensemble July 29-31

FRINDALE CENTRE

Kinetic Energy Dance Company *Galaxy Dances* July 18, Aug 1

OPERA

CANBERRA OPERA

Canberra Theatre, Director by Frederick von Flotow, July 15-18

For further details, contact *Opera Australia* on 4976000 (m) or 4974807 (f)

NSW

THEATRE

ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (3576610)

School Town *Jim Stepford* repertory of Australia, for infants and primary, South Coast and metropolitan areas until July 24

Indiablock Theatre Company drama for infants and primary, North Coast and Hunter areas until July 17

ENSEMBLE THEATRE (3591877)

I Ought To & In Pursuit by Neil Simon, directed by Hayes Gordon with Jane Bartha, Sharon Flanagan and Brian Young, Throughout July

FRANK STRAN'S BULL N' BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (3574627)

The Good Old Bad Old Days a musical revue from the days of the cowboy to today, with Gordon Peake, Barbara Wynson, Garry Meads, Neil Bryant and Helen Lomax, directed by George Corden Throughout July

GRIPPIN THEATRE COMPANY (333817)

Stables Theatre

New production, directed by Peter Kingman, HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (2123411)

Evita by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, directed by Harold Prince, with Patti LuPone, Paul Carroll, John O'May and Tony Alvarez, Throughout July

HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (3682526)

Mabres Corpus by Alan Bennett, directed Anne Neeson, with Jonathan Biggs, John Doyle, John Kirby, Julie Hesmondhalgh, Crispin Mayo, Alan McFadden, David Wood. To July 25

KIRREBILLY PUB THEATRE (0923412)

Kirribilli Hotel, Milson's Point *Die Private Eye Show* by Peter Quigley and Paul Chubb, music by Adrian Morgan, lyrics by P P Cawley, directed by Peter Quigley, with Zee Berman, Marge McCua, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson, Throughout July

MARIAN STREET THEATRE (4983166)

You Never Can Tell by George Bernard Shaw, directed by Tatyana Clark, with Patrick Dixon, Susan Lush, Alan Wilson, Maggie Horne, Karen Foster, Alan Tabor, Redmond Phillips, Peter Rowley and Gordon McDougall, Until July 4

Crossing *Allegro* by Alonso Algea, directed by John Hobson, with Robert van Maerbeek and Geoff Cunningham, Commences July 13

MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (9771880)

Tour to the Stars with Billy Raymond Commences July 1

NEW THEATRE (3591460)

The Workroom by Jean-Claude Greenberg, directed by John Tasker, Until July 4

The Manager by Bill Owen, with music by Tony Russell, directed by Peter Cowan, MINIBOX THEATRE (3591503)

Upfront Truth is written by David Hart, directed by Ned Astfield, with Michele Fanning, Until July 18

Downstairs, *Prose* by Vandy Hart, directed by Aubrey Miller, Until July 18, *Silver* with words by Tracy Stratton and sounds by Michael Crichton, directed by Ken

Carpenter, Commences July 29

Last Night Show A Couple of Strangers with John O'May, Denis Rutenatz and Max Lambert, Until July

NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (2571260)

Threshold, for primary schools and *The Delightful World of Jasper*, lessons for secondary schools, both directed by Ian Watson, with Nola Colfees, David London, Celia Alton, Bill Eggerding and Mary Brown, Throughout July

At the Stables, *The Wizard* (a play adapted by Ian Watson from Shakespeare, co-directed by Ian Watson and Nola Colfees, Commences July 31)

PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (307211)

Bondi Pavilion Theatre

Trap for a Loveli, *Men* a psychological drama directed by Peter Whalord, Throughout July

Q THEATRE (087212738)

No Name, *No Paul Draft* by Bob Harben, directed by Dorothy Warburton, *Death* commences July 3

RIVERINA TRUCKING COMPANY

The Rock, *Horror Show* by Richard O'Brien, Commences July 17

STUDIO SYDNEY (2611988)

Wynsday Chapel

Born and Alured by Alexander Buzo and *The Death of Mavis* by Barry Dickson, Commences July 9

REGENT THEATRE (2641988)

Master Macacus commences July 28

SHOPFRONT THEATRE FOR

YOUNG PEOPLE (3582384)

Free drama workshops on weekends, includes playbuilding, drama, puppetry, design, radio and video, Stephen Theatre Touring Company touring metropolitan and country areas with *The Tale* *Her* directed by Don Marron, *The Third World Horror Show* directed by Michael Webb and *Wheat* by Errol Bay Youth Theatre, *Shaman*, *The Third World Horror Show* and *Empire House* an adventure play created by young people and directed by Don Marron July 3 and 4

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY (25888)

Drama Theatre, 5081

Chicago by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, directed by Richard Wherrell, with musical direction by Peter Cawley, and Nancy Hayes, Geraldine Turner, Terry Donnan, Judi Connell, George Spurlock and J P Webster, Until July 11

Edie adapted by Louis Nowra from Wedekind's *Earth Spirit* and *Frundorf* *Edie*, directed by Jim Sherman, with Judy Davis, Kerry Walker, Brandon Burke, Ivan Raaij, Malcolm Robertson and Ralph Cottier, Commences July 21

THEATRE ROYAL (2216110)

The Doctor by Ronald Harwood, directed by Rodder Fisher, with Warren Mitchell, Gordon Chater and Ruth Cracknell, Until July 4

Chicago presented by Sydney Theatre Company commences July 17.

NEW ENGLAND THEATRE COMPANY (06722911)

School years and OCAP project: *Count Tev (adults), My Fair and His Baby* (primary); *An Evening for Myself* (adults) by Charles Dutoit; *The Magician Journey* by Thornton Wilder. (either high school); *Merchant* by William Shakespeare (either high school) August 2.

OPERA

THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (02888)

Opera Theatre, KOH

Tosca by Puccini, conducted by Carlo Frugone Cilano with production by John Copley; *La Traviata* by Verdi, conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by John Copley; *Alceste* by Handel, conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by Sir Robert Helpmann; *Les Huguenots* by Meyerbeer, conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by Leslie Massam and design by John Stoddart and Michael Stennett; and *Andrea* conducted by Richard Bonynge with production by John Copley and designs by Alan Low and Michael Stennett. In repertory throughout July.

For enquires contact Cecile Long on 2371200/2093900

QLD

THEATRE

ARTS THEATRE (062344)

One in a Lifetime by Han and Kaufman. Director, Ian Thomas; designer, Cathleen McLean. Throughout July.

The Little Fox Sisters (See 2pm July 18 onwards)

HER MAJESTY'S (2212777)

White Linen & A Kiss by Brian Clark, director, Brian Brett, with Robert Collyer July 27. Aug 15

LA BOITE (064622)

The Rovers by Harold Pinter, director, Malcolm Blaylock. To July 18. *Wings* by Arthur Kopit, director, David Bell. From July 24.

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY (2213861)

SGO Theatre. *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov, translated by David Cromer, director, Alan Edwards. From July 11.

DANCE

HER MAJESTY'S (2212777)

The Australian Ballet: The Three Musketeers July 10-16. QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY (2291339)

Caravan choreographed by Harold Collins, music, Ron Hammer; designer, Mike Reddin and Jennifer Cawdron. On tour at Broken Hill July 23, 24 and Adelong Festival Centre July 28-30.

OPERA

TOOWOOMBA ARTS THEATRE (0761201200)

The Peacock of Persepolis by Gilbert and Sullivan. Director, Brian Croxley July 23-Aug 8.

For enquires contact Jennifer Redpath on 23712819

SA

THEATRE

THE ACTING COMPANY (033-0331)

Breakfast workshop directed by Sue Rider. *Down and Out* directed by Sue Rider. Senior Secondary High School students July 20-31.

ALL OUT ENSEMBLE

The Red Skel. *The River in Spring* (See 8pm by Dara Fa director, Nicholas Tsiaras. To July 5. Also at Melbourne Universal Workshops July 15-Aug 2.

LA MAMA (Hindmarsh)

The Club by David Williamson, director, Jim Dale. To July 18.

Q THEATRE

The New Broadway by Noel Coward, director, Harry Hill. To July 18.

THE STAGE COMPANY

Space Theatre, Festival Centre. *Circus* a new musical by Paul Hanes and Ian Dixon, director, Bruce Osborne. July 29-Aug 1.

STATE THEATRE COMPANY (0331310)

Theatre 62. *Hilary Farmer & Brisbane Ladies* by Doreen Clarke, director, Kevin Palmer, designer, Sue Russell. To July 4. *An Fox Lake* by Shakespeare, directors, Nick Enright and Michael Folker, designer, Richard Roberts. July 13-Aug 1.

MAGPIE (Glen Innes) (Primary), a play about environmentalism. *Any Man's Son* A. Forum (Secondary), a play about

women in the workplace. Currently playing in schools throughout the state.

TRouPE

Troupe Theatre, Oxford St, Unley. *Savoir* by John Bayard, director, Keith Gallach and Veronique Jeffries. To July 10. *No-Go* for the Wicked by Richard Collins and David Kirk. Late Night Show to July 23.

For enquires contact Julie or Rob on 23712808

TAS

THEATRE

POLYGON (04-8018)

Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas. Burnie Civic Theatre July 1, 4. *Robert and Elizabeth* by Granier and Miller. Director, Don Gay. Devonport July 18-23.

SALAMANCA (231258)

In rehearsal until July 12. *Amber's Coming* (See written and directed by Richard Metherell (secondary). Company devised play. Items (primary). director, Les Wimpsey. Both in performance at schools around the state from July 12.

THEATRE ROYAL (0416366)

Theatre Royal Opera Company. *From* director, Alan Hume, with Jane Davis. To July 11. For enquires contact Lib. Assistant 032-29188.

VIC

THEATRE

AUSTRALIAN NUVEAU THEATRE (0993322)

Amidst Theatre. *Evita* by Alex Miller, director, Jean Pierre Mignon. World premiere July 9-Aug 9.

The Madman and the Nun by Wilkacy, translated by Christopher Barritt, director, Nicholas Tsiaras. Australian premiere July 13-Aug 23.

AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (0377123)

Front Theatre. *Armed at Roads* by Charles Marowitz, director, Paul Friedreich. To July 9.

Sunday Play Readings (Buck Theatre). *Love and the Single Traveller* by Grant Putter. July 12. *Bells* by Peter Masters. July 18.

ARENA THEATRE (0361933)

Accidental Death (lower primary) devised by MAGPIE team. Touring through July. Get The Pain (upper primary) devised by Area Theatre based on the story by Harry Nilsson. Through July. Drama Workshops week nights and weekends.

ARTS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA (03945554)

Touring country Victoria. Seven Two Next Year: director, Don Mackay, with Peter Adam and Kinty Child. June 9-July 26.

Schools Programme: Aesop's Fables (juniors, lower secondary) by Mixed Company. To July 24. Bookends (Year 8 secondary) by Mixed Company. To July 24. Puppet Power (secondary) by Melbourne Theatre of Australia. June 26-Aug 21.

COMEDY THEATRE (6425233)

The Drinker by Ronald Harwood, director Rodney Fisher, designer Laurence Deller, with Warren Mitchell, Gordon Chater, Ruth Crichell, Jennifer Hagan. From July 8 for six weeks.

COMEDY CAFE THEATRE

RESTAURANT (14192869)

Dr Chris, the most mysterious man in the world plays *The Threepenny Opera*. Directed and acted by Michael Parfitt, Tracy Harvey and David Shepard. Through July.

BANANA LOUNGE COMEDY ROOM (01928899)

A succession of the best of Melbourne's underground comedy. Fri's and Sat's.

DRAMA RESOURCE CENTRE (03738849)

Stronger than Supervision devised by Bourne Si TIE Team. Touring Central region July 6-Aug 21. Youth Theatre Festival devised for and by schools groups and community centres. July 13-17.

FOURS' COMPANY COMMUNITY THEATRE (0393111738)

Touring HSC literature programmes throughout July. Brunch and Shakespeare.

CROSSWINDS COMMUNITY THEATRE (0371624066)

Touring Youth Theatre Workshops throughout July.

LA MAMA (Bookings 34160821)

One Woman Show by Barry Dickson, director, Peter Green, with Anne O'Shaughnessy. July 3-19.

A Performance by 84.4RC — Brumby Action and Righters Collective. July 20-Aug 2.

LAST LAUGH THEATRE

RESTAURANT (41962330)

Downtown. *Foreground* (adults). Director, Tony O'Ceallaigh, with Mark Conway. Throughout July. Upstage: Variety Show changing weekly.

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (0394480000)

Athenaeum: *A Man For All Seasons* by Robert Bolt; director, Steven Chilton, designer, Paul Katherer, with Edwin

Hodgetts. To July 4.

Good Person of Szechuan by Bertolt Brecht; director, Bruce Myler, designer, Richard Price. July 8-Aug 22.

Russet Street: *The Merchant* by Harold Pinter, director, Judith Alexander, designer, Anna Fornaci. To Aug 1.

Athenaeum 2: *Antigone* by Sophocles, director, Steve Agnew, designer, Mark Wagner. July 1-Aug 22.

MILL THEATRE COMPANY (0352222318)

"Mill Nights" every Thursday evening. The Mill is open for community workshops. Traditional folk dancing with Faye McAlinden. Wed evenings for adults, alternative Sat afternoons for children. Mill Club for children. Sat mornings.

MUSHROOM TROUPE Mountbank (3767364)

Young Actors devised by Mushroom Troupe; director, Alison Richards. Tilllate July.

MURRAY RIVER PERFORMING GROUP (0380376160)

Touring Schools' Schools for Classes. Touring community centres. Crystal Bay Dances. Throughout July. Available for bookings.

PLAYBROOK (03048888)

Dalkeith Brooks Hall. Even Good For Dementia Patients by Tom Stoppard and Andre Previn, director, George Plimpton, with John Hopkins directing the Symphony Orchestra of the VCA, set design, John Beckett. July 18-Aug 8.

Downstairs: *Farwell Southern Ladies* by Doreen Clarke, director, Steven Palmer, designer, Sue Russell, with Monica Vaughan and Maggie Kirkpatrick. State Theatre Company of SA production. July 19-Aug 5.

THEATREWORKS (28304444)

Get Go Anywhere Show. Touring community centres.

UNIVERSAL THEATRE (01937771)

Thank God It's Not Christmas by Malcolm Franks, director Ian Robertson. An APG production. Throughout July.

WOOLLY JUMPERS TIE TEAM (0321223810)

Get It by Phil Suttor. Available for women's groups and clubs, also touring schools throughout July. *Finian's Candy* a youth theatre production. July 16 for six nights. *The Players*, touring Western Region football clubs, director Ray Mooney. Through July. *Just A Simple Stake*, touring class plays, with Phil Suttor, Greg Suttor and Ian Shires. Available for bookings throughout July.

VICTORIAN INDEPENDENT THEATRE COMPANY (38116147)

Impressions, *Madame Bovary* by Gustave, director, Alan Suttor. Phoenix Theatre, From July 15.

Elwood, July 18-25.

MAMBI AMATEUR GROUPS

Burn Theatre group 7621882. Clayton Theatre Group 8781702. Heidelberg Rep 492362. Malvern Theatre Company 2110028. Pumpkin Theatre 4282327. 1812 Theatre 7833966.

DANCE

NATIONAL THEATRE (03448221)

Wild Honey. Australian Contemporary Dance Company, choreography, Serafisy-Bekker. July 1-8.

PALACE THEATRE (03448851)

The Australian Ballet. Openings July 21-29. *Reverie*. Afternoon of a Four. Melbourne. Curious. Curious. July 31-Aug 6.

OPERA

PRINCESS THEATRE (03212801)

Victorian State Opera. *Der Freischütz* by Johann Strauss (in English), conductor Richard O'Neill, director, Robin Lovelace. From July 13.

For tickets contact Centre Tickets on 6515448.

WA

THEATRE

DOLPHIN THEATRE (03024440)

Greater Dramatic Society. *The Gentleman of Mâtre* by Shakespeare, with Cliff Gilman and Collin O'Brien. July 3-18.

HOLE IN THE WALL (03124601)

One man puppet show for adults, as yet untitled. Puppeteer, Peter Wilson, director, Greg Sheehan. July 9-Aug 1.

NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY (032123881)

Phantom. When We Are Married by J.B. Priestley, director, Edgar McCall, with Yvonne Geig, Margaret Ford, Joan Sydney, Faith Clayton and Jenny Michael. July 31-Aug 8.

PERTH ACTORS' COMPANY (02213900)

St. George's Theatre Company 2. Director, Ken Campbell-Doherty, with Paul English, Ray Richardson, Kathy English and Robin McIlroy. July 14-18.

REAL THEATRE (38115357)

E & Productions and Interact present *Not Like Us*. Director, Producer, Ray Cooney, with Leslie Phillips and Andrew Sachs. From July 15.

WINTER THEATRE

Princess May Theatre Promenade: *The Chase* by Erol Reby, Director, Ross Coli, with Deanne Kurty, Christine Parry, Marcella Schmitz and Jenny Vuketic July 3-23

Theater Song with Dennis Hollington and Jenny Valance: Songs by Jerome Kern and Cole Porter with original songs from around Latin night show Fri Sat, Sun July 3-23

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams, Director, Hal Davis July 29-Aug 13

Touring *On Our Own* by Nick Rudd Whistler and Goldsmiths July 17-25

DANCE

OCTAGON (96 26401)

Kinetics, Dance July 15-17

WA BALLET COMPANY

Touring in Pashmina Tom Price, Dampier and Kununurra July 6-25

OPERA

WA OPERA COMPANY

His Majesty's (131 62880) *La Bohème* by Pacific Musical Director, Gerald Krug, with Christine Leahmann and John Main, with sets from the Australian Opera. July 18-Aug 8.

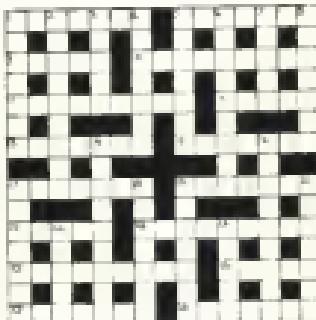
For further contact: Margaret Schmitz on 9411 1178.

(from part 1)

with the director, and I heard the answer from the advertising office, reputations and careers and work-experiences were constantly under-valued, continued to diminish, thrown away, laughed off. One actor, after no three years, the playing exclusively leading roles for (cf. Adelaide's State Theatre Company reported it as "a while, doing a fine bit with a company intensive"!) it seems not.

So what are we left with? A strange kind of no-man's land whereby, on the one hand, we arrogantly defy the writer in show us why they're better than we are, and on the other, when confronted by them, believe in such a way as to confirm that they are! Neither party can win. And both ways the result is self-deluding negative and wasted. The "new naturalism" residing in a dimming of the cultural change mentality is to be passionately welcomed but not when it's replaced by a reverse attitude of "we don't need them"! Either way it's immature. And we should be growing up.

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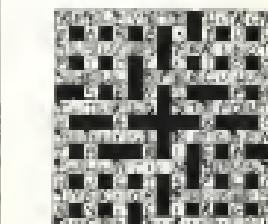
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CLUES

Across: 1. Liberty of John round Des (7); 3. Name, note, suitable to 'a poem' (7); 5. How we were in our salad days? (5); 10. Listen to the sounds — they're like small boys! (8); 11. Vegetable Sam, Gao and Pa prepare (9); 12. Cure for the doctor by the means (5); 13. A hard god? (7); 15. Dressed for a race with one colour (7); 17. A can coloured in the middle (7); 19. Person and surrounds with issue, we hear (7); 21. Many eye in the tree (3); 23. A playwright is plunder the monarch (8); 25. Woolly water? (6,3); 26. "Where e'er I go, my thoughts shall be my guide" (The Tempest) (5); 27. Akin to max givins for the finale (7); 28. Sweaty old actor about note (7).

Down:

1. Light the obscure golf map (5,4); 2. Compensation for former colonial member not back around one (8); 3. School of given (5); 4. Speaks ill of many to argue the point (7); 5. In SA: prohibition on the citizens going to South Africa (7); 6. Brilliant actress has an affliction (8); 7. Arous to back a fool (5); 8. Fellowed around right and guaranteed (7); 14. Run level with the negative (6); 16. Taking refuge in Surin, Fiji, Noumea (8); 17. Quality account reverted to the Free French (7); 18. Steps off the German honour (7); 19. Strangely sober, very prima (3); 20. Profligate poet? (7); 22. Somehow assumed major (5); 24. Superfluous crowd member? (5).



The first correct entry drawn on July 25 will receive one year's free subscription to *7/4*.

The winner of last month's crossword was T Jones of Berwick, Victoria.